

# EUNAVFOR MED OPERATION SOPHIA AND EUROPOL DETERMINED TO STRENGTHEN BILATERAL COOPERATION

22 Dec 2015

## [News Article](#)

Today, Rear Admiral Enrico Credendino, EU Operation Commander of the European Union military operation in the southern central Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED), operation Sophia, and Rob Wainwright, Director of Europol, signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance bilateral cooperation. Europol and EUNAVFOR MED are determined to strengthen direct bilateral cooperation to identify and dismantle criminal groups involved in migrant smuggling in the southern central Mediterranean.

The influx of migrants via the Mediterranean Sea has been exponentially rising in 2015 and the smugglers often force migrants to take very risky journeys across the Mediterranean to arrive in Europe. Criminal groups are driven by profit and show no regard for human life. The intelligence-led, European response to this problem was the establishment of the joint operational team (JOT) Mare - a unique model that combines Europol's expertise with national resources from key arrival, transit and destination countries in the EU, plus the United States, Frontex and Interpol. Using Europol's unique intelligence resources, JOT Mare identifies concrete investigative leads, supports its partners in initiating new investigations and provides criminal analysis.

Since its creation in March 2015, over 165 new cases have been initiated, data on over 3000 facilitators have been inserted into a dedicated database and more than 100 suspected vessels identified. A permanent Situation Centre at Europol monitors and produces daily reports on the migratory flows and criminal activities of the smuggling networks. A team of dedicated Europol experts supports investigators in hot spots in Italy and Greece.

The current situation, with the exponential increase of the migratory flow and the involvement of organised crime on a large scale, calls for the conversion of the JOT Mare into a new-style European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC). This will strengthen the ability to offer on-the-spot support and increase our analytical capabilities. Enhanced cooperation with EUNAVFOR MED will be an important element of the new EMSC strategy.

EUNAVFOR MED operation Sophia, launched on 22 June 2015, contributes to disrupting the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks in the southern central Mediterranean sea. On 7 October the operation moved into its second phase in high seas, to carry

out its mandate which foresees the boarding, search, seizure and diversion of smugglers' vessels. Until now the operation has contributed to saving more than 7200 people, while 43 people have been reported to the Italian authorities as possible smugglers, and 56 boats have been removed from illegal organisations' availability.

Both EUNAVFOR MED operation Sophia and Europol recognise the added value of cooperation in tackling criminal groups that facilitate and benefit from the migrant crisis. The signing of this agreement will facilitate the mutual coordination of activities and the exchange of knowledge and mutual support. It also defines mutual contact points for operational coordination and allows for participation in respective exercises and training.

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