INCREASED LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE

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News Article

The close and trusted cooperation between the US and Europe is becoming even tighter. Two senior officials from Europol, the European Union’s law enforcement agency, are visiting Washington this week. Head of Europol Operations, Deputy Director Will van Gemert, and Head of Counter Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, Manuel Navarrete, have had an extensive program of talks with counterparts including the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, Customs and Border Protection, US Secret Service, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Homeland Security Investigations), the Drug Enforcement Administration, the US Food and Drug Administration, US Department of the Treasury, United States National Central Bureau Interpol, and the Intellectual Property Rights Task Force.

During their visit, Deputy Director van Gemert and US Customs and Border Protection Deputy Commissioner Kevin K McAleenan signed two significant agreements relating to foreign fighters and illegal immigration. The Focal Point Travellers’ agreement will support EU and US law enforcement efforts to counter foreign fighters when they return to Europe or the US from i.e. Syria or Iraq. This will be through a number of means, including identifying facilitators of travel and recruitment as well as sources of financing. Equally the Focal Point CheckPoint agreement will enhance EU and US cooperation in combating illegal immigration, especially as exploited by organised crime groups.

Areas of increased cooperation between Europol and their US counterparts being discussed during the course of the visit include:

- Counter-terrorism, with particular focus on terrorist financing and the threat from foreign fighters
- Cybercrime, including an increased US presence in Europol headquarters and an increase in successful joint operations
- Europol’s continuing membership of the US Intellectual Property Rights Protection Task Force which helps protect global business interests, preventing criminal and terrorist infiltration of the legitimate economy
- Drug enforcement, money laundering, and assets seizure initiatives aimed at disrupting and dismantling terrorists and criminal networks operating on a global scale
Protection of victims of crime in both the EU and the US from various forms of criminal activity, inter alia child sexual abuse, economic crime and fraud, and counterfeiting of products especially medicines.

The already effective law enforcement relationship between the US and the European Union is built upon a cooperation agreement signed 10 years ago, and the US liaison bureau at Europol headquarters in The Hague in the Netherlands represents 11 US federal law enforcement agencies. Europol also has two senior liaison officers working in Washington as an efficient and reliable point of contact for US authorities. Every year Europol supports approximately 500 cases involving US authorities, of which 50 are high impact operations.

In 2014 the FDA and Europol supported an investigation into food fraud involving 33 different countries, where 1200 tonnes of food were seized and 96 people arrested. Transnational law enforcement cooperation is important, and even more necessary when it comes to the fight against cybercrime. Last November a massive international operation against Darknet marketplaces hidden on the TOR network selling illicit products such as drugs, weapons and stolen personal data and bank credentials was undertaken. The operation was initiated by US ICE and FBI who took down the infamous ‘Silk Road 2’ website. In Europe, the operation was conducted by 16 European countries and coordinated from Europol’s headquarters.

Meeting Deputy Director van Gemert at the conclusion of his visit, European Union Ambassador to the United States, David O’Sullivan, said: “These cooperative efforts, coupled with appropriate data protection safeguards, are an important measure aimed at enhancing the safety and security of EU and US citizens at a time when we face many common threats from both terrorism and organised crime.”