

TRAFFICKERS SUPPLYING CONFLICT ZONES WITH WEAPONS AND EXPLOSIVES DISARMED IN SPAIN

14 Nov 2020

[Press Release](#)

Properties worth about €10 million seized and seven suspects arrested



An investigation that involved the Spanish National Police (Policía Nacional), Mossos d'Esquadra and the Spanish Tax Agency (Agencia Tributaria) and supported by Europol, led to the dismantling of a large organised crime group involved arms trafficking and money laundering. The operational action took place on 12 November in the Spanish provinces of Alicante, Barcelona and Valencia.

The criminal network, made up of Latvian, Spanish and Ukrainian members, illegally transported weapons and explosives in commercial ships from Ukraine mainly to conflict zones in North Africa and the Middle East, subject to international embargoes. The illegal shipments were concealed in cargo ship transporting legally sourced armaments. The arm traffickers transported weapons and heavy armament, including tanks, through the Mediterranean. The criminal group was well-developed and carried out complex criminal activities internationally, including breaking a ship's captain out of prison, who had been detained for arms trafficking by Greek authorities. Cracks in the group's security started to show and a dispute between the group's leaders over the control of their maritime activities led to their downfall.

Results in brief

- › 7 suspects arrested
- › 7 house searches carried out
- › 18 properties worth about €10 million seized
- › 50+ financial products frozen

The criminal activity generated large profits, which were introduced into the legal economy. The criminal network had set up a well-organised money-laundering scheme which enabled them to invest their criminal proceeds in legal businesses. The profits were sent to tax havens before being sent to countries with lower financial accountability. The assets were then transferred to bank accounts in European countries, mainly Switzerland and the United Kingdom. From there, the criminals transferred the money to Spain where it was used under the camouflage of legal commercial activity. This scheme allowed them to invest the criminal profits in properties and finance their luxury lifestyles.

Complex investigation to catch the arms traffickers

Europol supported the investigation since its beginning in 2018. The complexity of the criminal activities required the involvement of experts in different fields, including economics, weapons, technology and commercial and international maritime transport.

Europol facilitated the information exchange and supported the case with operational analysis. During the action day, Europol provided support by deploying an expert to Spain to crosscheck operational information against Europol's databases and provide links to investigators in the field. Europol also provided technical support for the analysis of the seized electronic devices.

Headquartered in The Hague, the Netherlands, we support the 27 EU Member States in their fight against terrorism, cybercrime and other serious and organised forms of crime. We also work 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.

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