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EUROPOL

Europol is the law enforcement agency of the European Union. Our aim is to help achieve a safer Europe by supporting the law enforcement agencies of the EU member states in their fight against international serious and organised crime and terrorism. Europol uses its unique information and analysis capabilities and the expertise of more than 700 staff to identify and track the most dangerous criminal and terrorist networks in the EU.

THE POLICY CYCLE

In 2010, the EU established a multi-annual policy cycle[1]. Its aim is to ensure that in the fight against serious international and organised crime there is:

• effective cooperation between Member States law enforcement agencies, EU Institutions, EU Agencies and relevant third parties; delivering
• coherent and robust operational action targeting the most pressing criminal threats facing the EU.
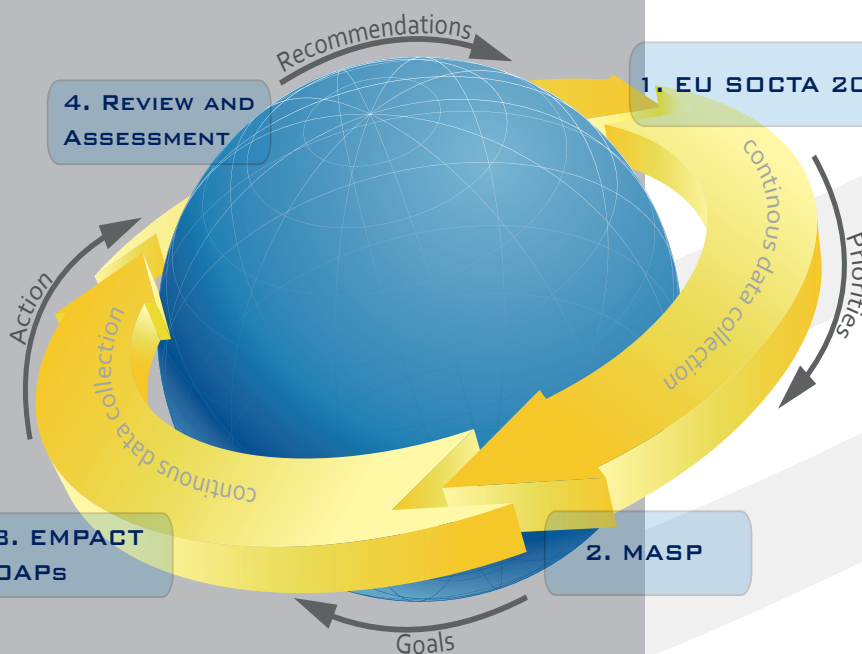
The full policy cycle will commence in 2013 and will last for four years. It consists of four key steps, which are:

Step 1: SOCTA – the Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment, developed by Europol, will deliver a set of recommendations based on an in-depth analysis of the major crime threats facing the EU. The Council of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers will use these recommendations to define its priorities for the next four years (2013-2017).

Step 2: MASP - Multi-Annual Strategic Action Plans will be developed from the priorities in order to define the strategic goals for combating each priority threat.

Step 3: EMPACT (European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats) – These projects will set out operational action plans (OAPs) to combat the priority threats.

Step 4: Review and assessment – the effectiveness of the OAPs and their impact on the priority threat will be reviewed by COSI[2]. In 2015, an interim threat assessment (SOCTA) will be prepared by Europol to evaluate, monitor and adjust (if required) the effort in tackling the priority threats.

The EU Policy Cycle

SOCTA

The SOCTA has a core role in the policy cycle. From strategic priorities through to operational action, it will ensure an intelligence-led approach will be at the heart of tackling the major criminal threats facing the EU.

In preparing the SOCTA, Europol will analyse trends and patterns in current crime data but will also look further, scanning the environment for other factors that will influence crime during the four years of the policy cycle. This will provide the basis for an evidential forecast of future threats to EU internal security.

The analysis underpinning the development of priorities will also support the planning of operational actions.

EMPACT - where are we today

For the interim period prior to the full policy cycle of 2013-2017, an initial, reduced cycle was initiated. The 2011 OCTA provided the basis on which Council agreed eight SOC priorities for 2011-2013. These have been translated into strategic goals, and eight EMPACT projects have been launched to coordinate ongoing action by Member States and EU organisations against the identified threats.
The eight EMPACT projects are:

■ **West Africa** – aiming to: weaken the capacity of organised crime groups active or based in West Africa to traffic cocaine and heroin to and within the EU.

■ **Western Balkans** – aiming to: mitigate the role of the Western Balkans, as a key transit and storage zone for illicit commodities destined for the EU and logistical centre for organised crime groups, including Albanian-speaking organised crime groups.

■ **Illegal Immigration** – aiming to: weaken the capacity of organised crime groups to facilitate illegal immigration to the EU, particularly via southern, south-eastern and eastern Europe and notably at the Greek-Turkish border and in crisis areas of the Mediterranean close to North Africa.

■ **Synthetic Drugs** – aiming to: reduce the production and distribution in the EU of synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances.

■ **Smuggling in shipping Containers** – aiming to: disrupt the trafficking to the EU, particularly in container form, of illicit commodities, including cocaine, heroin, cannabis, counterfeit goods and cigarettes.

■ **Trafficking in Human Beings** – aiming to: combat against all forms of trafficking in human beings and human smuggling (related to this phenomenon) by targeting the organised crime groups conducting such criminal activities in particular at the southern, south-western and south-eastern criminal hubs in the EU.

■ **Mobile (Itinerant) Organised Crime Groups** – aiming to: reduce the general capabilities of mobile (itinerant) organised crime groups to engage in criminal activities.

■ **Cybercrime** – aiming to: step up the fight against cybercrime and the criminal misuse of the internet by organised crime groups.

Improvements in cooperation are already being seen in the current priority areas, with joint operations and investigations now being run.

Information from these investigations returns to Europol via its secure system, SIENA, to be analysed via Europol's unique analysis system of the Analysis Work Files (AWFs)[3]. The intelligence derived from these investigations will inform the conclusions of the SOCTA 2013.

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[1]Council Conclusions on the creation and implementation of an EU policy cycle for organised and serious international crime, doc. 15358/10 COSI 69 ENFOPOL 298 CRIMORG 185 ENFOCUSTOM 94.
[2]COSI: Standing committee for the EU internal security.
[3]AWF: An AWF is a database on a specific crime area which is intrinsically linked to specific forms of operational support offered by Europol. In effect an AWF is the only existing legal tool at European level to store, process and analyse factual information ('hard' data) and in particular 'intelligence' (or 'soft' data), including personal data of sensitive nature at the same time. Once information is received within an Analysis Work File, Europol will make sure that all the data is made available for analysis. This means, to start with, that data is processed in a structured way so it can be continuously exploited and enhanced.