

The criminal network risked the lives of hundreds of migrants while transporting them from France to the UK



The Hague, 30 September 2020

A major operation involving judicial and law enforcement authorities from Belgium, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, supported by Europol and Eurojust, led to the dismantling of a large network of criminals smuggling migrants in life threatening conditions across the English Channel.

Spanning several days starting from 28 September, the action involved law enforcement officers from the Belgian Federal Police, the British Home Office Immigration Enforcement, the Dutch Royal Marechaussée and, in France, the BMR (Brigade Mobile de Recherche) of Coquelle and OCRIEST (Office central de répression de l'immigration et de l'emploi d'étrangers sans titre AKA Central Office against illegal immigration and employment of undocumented workers), acting on rogatory commission from an investigating judge of the Lille JIRS.

12 suspects were arrested in the combined operation, including 2 in The Netherlands, 7 in France and 3 in the UK. The overall seizures during the two action days included 12 vehicles, 10 rubber boats and engines, 152 life jackets, a caravan, a boat trailer, jewellery, about €48 000 in cash, documents and mobile devices.

This investigation targeted a developing trend of migrant smuggling involving small boats across the English Channel. This criminal activity has escalated exponentially in the recent months with over 4600 irregular migrants detected since 2018 on the UK shores and increased interceptions in France. The successful action demonstrates the results that can be achieved through intensive cooperation and information exchange, which is essential to tackle this growing form of human trafficking.

Overloaded boats and rough weather

The organised crime group comprised mainly Iranian nationals living in France, the Netherlands and the UK. The network is believed to have made huge profits from smuggling migrants in small boats from the north coasts of France to the UK. The suspects organised their criminal activity through ties in different countries. Members of the criminal group purchased inflatable boats and engines from Germany and the Netherlands and transported them to the departure points. . There, they were providing training skilled migrants on how to operate the boats while charging an average of €3000 per person for the crossings. Information gathered during the investigations provided confirmation that the criminal organisation had facilitated the illegal sea crossing of a large number of migrants. Transporting migrants in overloaded

boats, often in very difficult weather conditions on one of the busiest commercial shipping lanes in the world, endangered the lives of both the migrants and also the law enforcement officers conducting sea rescue operations.

Close cooperation across the North Sea

The action is a result of a close cooperation between Belgium, France, the Netherlands and The United Kingdom since June 2020, supported by Eurojust and Europol. The initial information sharing led to the creation of a Joint Investigation Team in September.

With the information sharing that took place during the first coordination meeting at Eurojust, the UK was able to react quickly and identify a linked domestic investigation. Following a period of intense negotiations facilitated by the respective National Desks at Eurojust, it was agreed that the UK would join the Joint Investigation Team, which facilitated this action day.

Frank Demeester, public prosecutor's office West-Flanders, human smuggling department, said: *"It is clear that organised crime groups, specifically in cases of illegal migration and human smuggling, are working on an international level. They are not bothered concerned by the boundaries between the different countries. That is why the four countries around the North Sea have to must work closely together to fight this type of criminality."*

By combining forces from the judicial authorities of The Netherlands, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom, we were able to put together all the pieces of the jig-saw puzzle very quickly and confront different members of the same OCG. In times rendered more difficult by COVID19, it was thanks to the Eurojust and Europol network and video conferencing that we could finalise all the necessary arrangements."

Europol supported the operation by facilitating the information exchange, organising operational meetings and providing analytical support with two intelligence analysts dedicated to this high priority case. On the action day, Europol set-up a Virtual Command Post to facilitate the operational coordination and the real-time exchange of information between law enforcement officers on the ground in real time.

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Further information:

- For Belgium: Mr Frank Demeester, prosecutor's office West-Flanders, Phone: + 32 470 20 69 64
- For France: Cédric LEUX, Chargé de mission politique judiciaire de la ville et relations presse, Parquet du Tribunal judiciaire de LILLE, Phone +33 618 178 158, presse.pr.tj-lille@justice.fr
- For Netherlands: Majoor Robert van Kapel, Senior spokesperson, Koninklijke Marechaussee, Phone +31 6-20302345, HA.v.Kapel@mindef.nl

- For UK: Home Office Newsdesk, Phone + 44 300 123 3235
- For Eurojust: Mr Ton Van Lierop, Spokesperson, Phone +31 70 412 55 18, tvanlierop@eurojust.europa.eu

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ESMA Publishes Final Report for Guidelines on Internal Control

The purpose of these Guidelines is to communicate what ESMA considers to be the characteristics and components of an effective internal control structure within a CRA. The guidelines are structured according to two main parts, establishing:

- ESMA's views on the components and characteristics that should be present in a CRA to demonstrate a strong framework for internal controls; and
- ESMA's views on the components and characteristics that a CRA should evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of internal control functions within such a framework.

ESMA conducted a public consultation on these Guidelines to gather the views of CRAs and other relevant stakeholders. A number of amendments and clarifications were introduced into the final guidelines to take into account the views expressed during this consultation.

Next steps

The Guidelines in Annex I will be translated into all official languages and published on ESMA's website. The Guidelines will apply from 1 July 2021.

EUIPO and ECN join forces to support

young companies

September 30, 2020 [About the EUIPO](#)

EUIPO and ECN join forces to support young companies



Some entrepreneurs and start-ups, particularly at the early stages of setting up a business, find it hard to get the financial backing necessary to take their innovative ideas off the ground. Others, often due to lack of familiarity with the topic, fail to see the benefits of protecting intellectual property when deciding to take their business forward. To a large degree, the chances of success depend on the quality of the information SMEs have at their disposal.

In the quest to alleviate some of the issues young companies face, the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) and the European Crowdfunding Network (ECN), have signed a collaboration agreement to help and support small and medium-sized enterprises (SME).

For the ECN, this collaboration is a good opportunity to promote crowdfunding as a viable means to boost entrepreneurship, social innovation and job creation. In addition, the EUIPO intends to maximise the outreach of the ECN's network to transmit the importance of IP rights (trademarks, patents, design, etc.) and to empower SMEs through knowledge about intellectual property protection.

The ECN is an independent professional crowdfunding association that supports its members in carrying out initiatives aimed at innovating, representing, promoting and protecting the European crowdfunding industry.

As part of its [Strategic Plan 2025](#), the SME Programme, under the 'Ideas Powered for business' brand aims to support and empower SMEs on their business journey. The recently launched '[Ideas Powered for business](#)' hub offers made-to-measure information for SMEs, as well as the possibility to

[sign up for free personalised legal advice](#) on their intellectual property questions.

Both organisations are committed to providing the tools and the necessary know-how to support SMEs in their business journey through training models, joint webinars and events.

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[**EU-UN new agreement for mutual support in peace operations and c**](#)

30/09/2020 – 10:04

Videos

29 September 2020, New York–The United Nations and the European Union signed an agreement today in the margins of the 75th session of the General Assembly to enhance cooperation and strengthen collective response in peace operations and crisis management.

[**EIB and Fund FLAG agree €25 million loan for cities across Bulgaria**](#)



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- **20% of investment for energy efficiency and climate adaptation**
- **Supported projects expected to create 1 500 construction jobs**
- **Linked with advisory and technical assistance from European Investment Advisory Hub**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) and Fund FLAG have signed a €25 million loan to promote urban regeneration and rehabilitation in cities across Bulgaria. Fund FLAG will match the loan amount with €25 million of its own resources and channel the total €50 million to municipalities, municipal enterprises and other institutions responsible for providing public services.

Fund FLAG will support investments for upgrading urban green areas and open public spaces, improving sustainable urban transport and renovating and reconstructing public buildings (schools, health centres and administrative buildings). In addition, it will focus on upgrading small-scale basic municipal infrastructure (road network, drinking water and sewers) and climate change adaptation measures.

This operation forms part of a wider collaboration to increase the firepower of cohesion funding for urban development. Earlier this year, the EIB, the Fund of Funds (Fund Manager of Financial Instruments in Bulgaria) and Fund FLAG [established the Bulgarian Urban Investment and Advisory Platform](#). Financed by the European Investment Advisory Hub, this platform aims to benefit Bulgarian municipalities by coordinating the efforts of funding and advisory partners, both at EU and national level, and bringing together EU cohesion funding with EIB lending and advice via dedicated urban development financial instruments and intermediaries.

“As we rebuild our economies following the COVID-19 crisis, we must pay special attention to urban development and make sure we build cities that will prosper today and far into the future,” said EIB Vice President Lilyana Pavlova. “The loan we signed today marks an important step in the EIB’s support for Bulgarian cities. It will make a positive contribution to economic growth and job creation, reducing energy bills for consumers and increasing the attractiveness of urban areas as business locations and tourism destinations. The EIB’s support for Fund FLAG will also play an important role in its facilitation capacity so that additional EU structural funds can be absorbed by the respective beneficiaries with the goal of supporting urban development. As the EU bank, we are committed to continuing to play our key role in supporting cohesion and climate action projects across Bulgaria through our lending and advisory activities.”

“The financing contract with the EIB is another step forward for Fund FLAG and financial instruments for urban development. By pursuing its mission to support the Bulgarian local authorities in their efforts to build sustainable, green and dynamically developing Bulgarian cities and regions for the last 13 years, FLAG has established itself as a reliable and preferred partner,” said FLAG Executive Director Nadia Dankinova. “We are confident that the implementation of the platform will fill a financing gap for important investment projects arising from municipal investment programmes. The partnership with the EU bank and the Bulgarian Fund of Funds is strategic and we are confident that it will be a long-term and very successful one. We are fully ready to start offering the product, structured with this financing contract, and to contribute to speeding up the economic recovery and the sustainable development of Bulgarian municipalities and regions.”

Background information

The [European Investment Advisory Hub](#) (EIAH) is a partnership between the EIB Group and the European Commission under the Investment Plan for Europe. The EIAH is designed to act as a single access point to various types of advisory and technical assistance services. It supports the identification, preparation and development of investment projects across the European Union. The EIAH is helping project promoters active in the urban development sector identify, prepare and implement more investments to increase the attractiveness and resilience of European cities. Today, the Hub’s partner network includes more than 40 local institutions, with almost 30 formal agreements signed with national promotional banks and institutions (NPBIs) and other partners. Through a dedicated call for proposals, the Hub made funding and technical support available to NPBI partners to develop their capacity to deliver advisory services locally and boost investments on the ground. Watch a short video on the [Advisory Hub’s support in Bulgaria here](#).

Fund FLAG is a state policy-driven instrument aimed at Bulgarian municipalities and their financing needs for investment projects implemented using grants under the Operational programmes or other European schemes. Fund FLAG provides bridge financing and long-term loans for the provision of own contributions. For the past 10 years, Fund FLAG has supported 220 out of the 265 municipalities in Bulgaria, allocating over €0.7 billion in loans.