

#JusticeDone: Rare books recovered in Romania in €2 million London warehouse heist investigation

13 members of the Organised Crime Group behind the theft on trial in the UK



The Hague, 18 September 2020

On 16 September, following the execution of a European investigation order, a house search led by the Romanian authorities in the county of Neamt uncovered the rare books buried underground. Reported stolen from a warehouse in Feltham (UK) in 2017, the priceless historical antiques included first editions of Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton from the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The books will now be sent to Italy for examination in order to confirm their authenticity.



This discovery is the result of an international cooperation between judicial and law enforcement authorities in the United Kingdom (Metropolitan Police Service), Italy (Italian Carabinieri – Arma dei Carabinieri) and Romania (Directorate for Investigation of Organized Crime and Terrorism Central Office and Romanian National Police – Poliția Română) with the support of Eurojust and Europol. The individuals suspected with the theft are currently in pre-trial detention in the United Kingdom. 13 suspects have been charged with conspiring to commit burglaries between December 2016 and April 2019 and to acquire criminal property. Twelve have already pleaded guilty and the sentencing is due to take place end of September 2020.

A three year-long international cooperation

In 2017, following the €2 million heist in the UK executed by an organised crime group composed of Romanian nationals, a Joint Investigation Team was set up between the cooperating countries with the support of Eurojust and Europol. This joint investigation framework provided the involved judicial and law enforcement authorities with the analytical tools, the coordination of information exchange and the judicial expertise to carry out several criminal investigation activities. As a result, 15 suspects linked to the criminal organisation were arrested in the UK and Romania in [June 2019](#).

In [January 2020](#), further outcomes emerged from this coordinated investigation with the arrest of the kingpin behind the cultural loot. The suspect, a Romanian national wanted by the British authorities, was arrested in Italy (Turin) and his arrest and collaboration were decisive for the success of this important joint operation. The respective National Desks at Eurojust have continued to support the judicial follow up, including facilitating the transfer of judicial proceedings from Romania to the UK.

Safeguarding cultural heritage from organised crime

This operation is a double success for law enforcement who tracked the suspects down and recovered the stolen treasures before they went for sale. Europol's Analysis Project (AP) FURTUM dedicated to tackling all areas of property crime was involved and assisted with operational coordination, analytical support and the exchange and sharing of vital information and intelligence to support undercover agents.

[Joint investigation team leads to dismantling of one of Europe's most active Albanian-speaking networks trafficking cocaine into Europe](#)

[IT](#) | [NL](#)

A 5-year long investigation led by Italy culminated this week in 20 arrests and pre-trial detentions throughout Europe



The Hague, 17 September 2020

An unprecedented international operation involving judicial and law enforcement authorities in 10 countries has resulted in the complete takedown of the Albanian-speaking 'KOMPANIA BELLO' criminal group, one of the most active cocaine-trafficking networks in Europe.

In the early hours of 15 September, hundreds of police officers, including special intervention teams in close cooperation with prosecutors and investigative officers, and with the support of Europol and Eurojust, carried out coordinated raids against the members of this highly professional criminal syndicate.

As a result of this joint action, 20 individuals were arrested in Italy (5), the Netherlands (2), Germany (2), Greece (2), Romania (1), Hungary (1), Spain (1), Albania (5) and Dubai (1). The suspects have been placed in pre-trial detention for international narcotic substances trafficking, illegal possession and distribution of drugs and brutal assaults, including murder. These arrests follow those of 84 other members of this criminal group early on in the investigation in Italy, Ecuador, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Germany.

This international sweep follows a complex 5-year long investigation led by

the **Italian State Police** (Polizia di Stato) under the direction of the **Public Prosecutor's Office of Florence** (Procura della Repubblica di Firenze). It is considered the biggest of its kind ever against Albanian-speaking organised crime and is the result of a Joint Investigation Team with the participation of Italy and The Netherlands, in which the parties have worked closely together for five years. Close to 4 tonnes of cocaine and over €5.5 million in cash were seized over the course of this investigation.

Your browser does not support the video tag, please click [here](#) to see the video.

A sophisticated business model

For years, international importers of cocaine worked separately from the wholesalers and the gangs distributing the drug on the streets. In this case, the Albanian-speaking network under investigation ditched the entire model and controlled the whole chain – from arranging huge shipments directly from South America to distribution all across Europe.

Using sophisticated encrypted communication means, the organisation's ringleader – a 40-year old Albanian based in Ecuador – negotiated directly with the South American drug cartels, arranged huge shipments of cocaine to the major ports of Europe and, with the help of accomplices based in Italy, the Netherlands and Albania, organised distribution throughout Europe. The cocaine was smuggled across European borders concealed in vehicles equipped with sophisticated hidden compartments.

The criminals laundered their proceeds using an underground alternative remittance system of Chinese origin, known as the fei ch'ien system. Much like the Islamic hawala transfer system, people using the fei ch'ien deposit a sum in a network 'agency' in one country. Another operator withdraws the equivalent amount elsewhere in the world and passes it on to the intended recipient. Leaving not a trace of tell-tale evidence for law enforcement investigators, the network is believed to have laundered millions of euro through this system.

A joint strategy to target the whole chain

Operation LOS BLANCOS, coordinated at the international level by Europol and Eurojust, was the culmination of many months of meticulous planning between law enforcement and judicial authorities in preparation for the action.

Initiated by the Italian State Police in 2015, under the direction of the Public Prosecutor's Office of Florence (Procura della Repubblica di Firenze), a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) was set up between Italy and the Netherlands with the assistance and financing of Eurojust and Europol. The partners in the JIT have since worked closely together to reveal the actual magnitude and complexity of the criminal activity of the KOMPANIA BELLO gang, to establish a joint strategy and to organise the intensive exchange of information and evidence needed to prepare for the final phase of the investigation.

All through the action day, smooth and effective cooperation took place at

many European border crossings. A joint Operational Command Room was set up at Europol's headquarters to coordinate the different actions taking place simultaneously across all the countries involved. A Europol expert was also deployed to Florence to provide appropriate operational support to the Italian authorities, ensuring swift analysis of new data as it was being collected during the action and adjusting the strategy as required. Judicial coordination was provided from a coordination centre at Eurojust, with the real-time involvement of prosecutors and investigative judges for execution and adaptation of the mutual legal assistance requests needed to carry out the cross-border actions.

The following authorities took part in this investigation:

- **Italy:** The Public Prosecutor's Office of Florence (*Procura della Repubblica di Firenze*), the State Police (*Polizia di Stato*),
- **The Netherlands:** Public Prosecutor's Office Amsterdam (*OM Amsterdam*), Financial and Economic crime unit Amsterdam (*Finec*), National Police (*Politie*)
- **Greece:** Hellenic Police (*Ελληνική Αστυνομία*)
- **Hungary:** National Police, Bács-Kiskun County Police Headquarters (*Bács-Kiskun Megyei Rendőr-főkapitányság*) and Chief Prosecution Office of Bács-Kiskun County (*Bács-Kiskun Megyei Főügyészség*)
- **Romania:** Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (*DIICOT*), Prosecutor's Office attached to the Iasi Court of Appeal (*Parchetul de pe langa Curtea de Apel Iasi*), Iasi Brigade for Countering Organized Crime (*BCCO Iasi*), Iasi County Police – Criminal Investigations Department (*IPJ Iasi – SIC*)
- **Germany:** Federal Criminal Police Office (*Bundeskriminalamt*), Public Prosecutor's Offices Lübeck, Duisburg, Mönchengladbach and Berlin, State Criminal Police Office (*Landeskriminalamt*) of Schleswig Holstein, Bavaria, North-Rhine Westphalia and Berlin.
- **Spain:** National Police (*Policía Nacional*), Investigate Court number 6 in Valencia and Public Prosecution Office Valencia (*Fiscalia Superior de la Comunidad Valenciana*)
- **United Kingdom:** National Crime Agency
- **Albania:** State Police (*Policia e Shtetit*)
- **Emirate of Dubai:** Dubai Police Force (القيادة العامة لشرطة دبي)

For further information: Italian State Police press release [[link to follow](#)]

[Christine Lagarde: Interview with Challenges](#)



INTERVIEW

Interview with Christine Lagarde, President of the ECB, conducted by Jean-Pierre de La Rocque

18 September 2020

When you spoke at the Council on Foreign Relations in December 2018, you stated that gender parity in the workplace is a “revolutionary process” that must be achieved through the use of incentives, such as corporate or government quotas. Do you think that this “revolutionary” process is now a reality in most of the major institutions, businesses and governments?

There is a certain level of awareness now, but we’re only just getting started. Gender inequality still exists in terms of access to the job market and the pay gap. In OECD countries, the gender wage gap is still 13%. Women are working more and more but are still under-represented in management positions in both the private and public sectors. The coronavirus crisis has made the situation worse for women. Women make up almost 70% of the healthcare workforce; they are at greater risk from a health perspective. During lockdown, they have been active on all fronts, forced to work while caring for their children, not to mention coping with the threat of domestic violence. As in every economic crisis, they are at greater risk of losing their jobs or of having their wages cut.

The road towards gender parity in the workplace is anything but straight. It is a long-term process that requires vigilance at all times from every segment of society.

Is the process starting to produce results? As our report shows, women are finally gaining access to management positions. Are we witnessing the shattering of the glass ceiling, even though some institutions are still lagging significantly behind in terms of gender parity (and I am not just

referring to the ECB Governing Council!)?

We have made some progress, but unfortunately there is a civil society consensus at international level that, given the still slow pace of advancement, any significant gains on the equality front will take decades rather than years to emerge – unless something changes. Even if one particular female director, or a company or organisation helps to bring about change, we cannot focus on this one achievement at the expense of the bigger picture. There are still too few women in management worldwide, particularly in the economic and financial spheres, including central banks. The 19 euro area central banks are run exclusively by men. Of the 25 members that make up the ECB Governing Council, Isabel Schnabel – a member of the Executive Board – and I are the only two women in the family photo. That's not how it should be!

More generally, do you think that women have become more influential, even outside the institutions, firms or countries with female leaders?

I think that progress is being made within institutions, firms and countries and that people are acknowledging women's ability to see things differently from men. We take a different approach to risk-taking, for example. You've often heard me say that if Lehman Brothers had been Lehman Sisters, the financial crisis of 2008 would no doubt have turned out differently. And the quality of a number of women leaders in the political or economic arena has certainly enabled better management of the unprecedented health crisis which we are now experiencing. But there are still too few women in positions of responsibility. More needs to be done in many areas. Just to give one example: we should encourage men to take paternity leave, and grant it to them for longer periods than their current entitlement of a few days or weeks.

And beyond the professional world, too, there is still quite a way to go, as is sadly evident from the prevalence of domestic violence and number of femicides.

Having long worked with (predominantly) male teams, do you see a change in men's attitudes to women accessing top jobs?

Yes, men are definitely more accepting than before of women attaining the most senior positions, and corporate behaviour is beginning to change. Not only with regard to career paths, but also in day-to-day interaction between men and women. This is a valuable and necessary transformation; moreover, the younger generations are more aware of these issues. But the real change in mentality will come when nobody, male or female, questions the legitimacy of a woman holding a position of power.

Do you find it easier and more pleasant to have women around you?

What matters in a team is the diversity of backgrounds and profiles and the complementarity of its members. Gender is a part of this necessary diversity, but it's not the sole criterion.

In your view, are there still cultural, ideological or religious barriers in some countries which are impeding this “revolution” to bring about gender parity at work. Isn’t it true that women have fewer rights than men in some societies?

Yes, there are all kinds of barriers. Take legal barriers for a start. I suggest you read the most recent World Bank report on the subject. On average, women around the world enjoy only three-quarters of the rights afforded to men. Legal inequities are still enshrined in laws, even in certain constitutions, in matrimonial law, inheritance law, the signing of contracts and access to credit. Much progress has been made over the past 50 years – and France is well-placed in this respect – but in general, at global level, there is still a long way to go! Female emancipation boosts productivity and economic development. That is an established and documented fact. So, what are we waiting for?

Romania and UK judicial authorities jointly dismantle ‘loverboy’ criminal network specialized in trafficking and sexually exploiting young girls



The Hague, 18 September 2020

During a Joint Action Day executed on the 9th of September 2020, judicial and law enforcement authorities in The UK and Romania have arrested 21 members of an organized criminal group specialized in trafficking young Romanian girls into the UK, Ireland and Germany for purpose of sexual exploitation.

The criminal group was active since 2009 and had a well-established hierarchical structure. Using the so-called ‘loverboy’-method, the OCG members targeted young Romanian girls from vulnerable backgrounds. The victims (including minors) were seduced by the offenders with false promises of sentimental partnerships, and a future luxury lifestyle. In reality, the victims were instead lured into prostitution and sexually exploited in Romania (until the minor teenagers turned 18), after which they were transported (by use of counterfeit ID documents) and sexually exploited in The UK, Ireland and Germany. In order to conceal and launder the profits from their criminal activity, the members of the group purchased luxury assets, registering it under third parties’ name.

Eurojust has facilitated an integrated approach to this cross-border investigation since February 2019, including judicial cooperation endeavors

to create a Joint Investigation Team, which was awarded almost EUR 22.000 in Eurojust funding. The JIT made it possible to streamline the exchange of evidence, accelerate and intensify the investigation and carefully prepare and coordinate the Action Day's execution, during which 32 house searches were conducted (23 in Romania and 9 in the UK). Numerous victims were recovered and provided with support and assistance, and the searches also resulted in seizures of a weapon and of multiple valuable assets including five luxury cars, real-estate properties and important amounts of money.

✖ Daniela **Buruiana**, National Member of Eurojust for Romania, said: *"Cross border THB investigations have never been an easy task for prosecutors and police officers. Close cooperation and coordination between the competent authorities in different jurisdictions and the use of the support tools available at EU level are essential in conducting successful THB investigations. This is another good example of excellent joint work across different authorities and agencies. I am glad that Eurojust has been involved and provided assistance and support since the very beginning. Congratulations to all the actors which contributed to the success of this operation."*

Background: Eurojust cases addressing Trafficking in Human Beings

The number of cases at Eurojust related to investigations of Trafficking in Human Beings has increased steadily over the last years from around 100 cases in 2016 to 183 cases registered in 2019. This has also lead to an increase in the number of Joint Investigation Teams (JIT), which has proven an effective tool to fight this form of crime, from 31 JITs in 2016 to 63 JITs in 2019.

Romania and the UK have been particularly active in this respect and cooperated closely in 76 THB investigations in the past four years:

Cases registered by Romania involving the UK	8	7	12	21	5	53
Cases registered by the UK involving Romania	6	6	4	6	1	23
Total registered cases involving Romania and the UK	14	13	16	27	6	76

International Contact Group on Venezuela Ministerial Declaration



1. The International Contact Group met at Ministerial level by videoconference on 17 September. The Group welcomed the participation for the first time of Argentina as full member and announced that Bolivia would be stepping down from the Group.
2. ICG members reaffirmed that the only sustainable solution to the Venezuelan crisis will be an inclusive political, peaceful and democratic one, through free, credible, transparent and fair legislative and presidential elections. They expressed their concern at the narrowing of the democratic space in the country and particularly with a view to the organisation of the upcoming legislative elections, and called for the provision of electoral guarantees in accordance with international standards and the Constitution of Venezuela. Furthermore, they called on all parties to commit to an inclusive and credible negotiation. The ICG welcomes the recent release of some political prisoners and the termination of politically motivated judicial proceedings against members of the opposition, and insists that all remaining political prisoners should be released immediately and unconditionally, and house arrest terminated.
3. ICG members concluded that conditions are not met, at the moment, for a transparent, inclusive, free and fair electoral process. All obstacles to political participation must be removed in order for a meaningful electoral process to take place. This includes, inter alia, respect for the constitutional mandate of the democratically elected National Assembly, returning control of political parties to their rightful administrators, cessation of the disqualification and prosecution of political leaders, full restoration of their and other candidates' rights to equal political participation, a comprehensive update of the voter register, including young voters and Venezuelans abroad, and an independent and balanced CNE, and equal participation and unrestricted access to all media. The ICG requests that these obstacles to free, fair and credible elections be promptly addressed.
4. ICG members welcome the call to the international community to observe the elections, as a fundamental guarantee of transparency, freedom and fairness of any future electoral process. The ICG notes that the current electoral timetable does not allow the deployment of an Election Observation Mission, nor does it leave enough time and political space for the parties to negotiate the conditions for credible, free and fair elections. The ICG calls

for guaranteed minimum conditions of credibility, transparency and inclusiveness in the electoral process, and for the ability to observe the elections without interference, including unobstructed access. The effectual requirements for an electoral observer mission need to be in place credibly and in a timely manner before its deployment.

5. A negotiated process, owned by Venezuelans, and leading to a reinstatement of public powers, transparent and internationally monitored elections and a package of guarantees enabling political coexistence, are essential elements to overcome the crisis, achieve national reconciliation and economic recovery.

6. ICG members reiterate their deep concern about the worsening humanitarian situation in the country, which is now aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst acknowledging the recent expansion of the humanitarian space inside the country, including the authorisation for the EU humanitarian aid bridge in August, the ICG reiterated its call for full, unhindered and unimpeded access for both humanitarian personnel and goods, to provide urgently needed access to medicine, food, gasoline and basic health services. An improvement of the environment for humanitarian actors to operate in line with humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence is necessary to step up the response capacity of the humanitarian organisations. Increased donors support for the humanitarian response, as Venezuela remains one of the least funded humanitarian crises in the world, is much needed.

7. ICG members expressed their support for the work of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN HCHR) and of the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission, and called for their unfettered access to sites in the country in order to carry out their mandates. ICG members expressed deep concern about human rights violations, as updated in recent reports by UN HCHR Bachelet and the UN Fact-Finding Mission. The ICG stands ready to assist the UN HCHR in her efforts to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Venezuela. The full respect of political rights in the country requires the return of Venezuela to democracy and the rule of law.

8. More than ever Venezuela needs the support of an international community that works together. The ICG expresses its continuing willingness to increase contacts with regional and international partners in order to foster a common understanding and response to the situation in Venezuela. Articulated and complementary international efforts are crucial to help Venezuelans restore democracy and the Constitutional order. Close contacts with national stakeholders will also continue.