

# Coordinated crackdown on 'Ndrangheta mafia in Europe

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***Unique joint investigation by judiciary and police forces in the Netherlands, Italy, Germany and Belgium culminates in the largest coordinated joint action against an organised criminal group to date in Europe.***

During a joint action day starting today in the early hours, judicial and law enforcement authorities in the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg have taken coordinated and decisive action against the 'Ndrangheta. This aggressive, mafia-style organised criminal group is one of the most powerful criminal networks in the world, and controls much of Europe's cocaine trade, combined with systematic money laundering, bribery and violent acts.

The operation, code-named 'Pollino', is the biggest of its kind to date in Europe. Several hundred police, including special intervention units, were engaged in today's action, together with prosecutors and investigative officers. The judicial authorities and law enforcement agencies involved have been working intensively together since 2016, including in a joint investigation team (JIT) supported by Eurojust, the EU's Judicial Cooperation Unit, and Europol in The Hague, to prepare the action.

 As a result of close cooperation, almost 4 000 kg of cocaine and hundreds of kilos of other drugs have been detected across Europe during the course of the investigation. By 12:00 on the action day, 84 suspects have been reported arrested, including high-ranking members of the mafia network. An estimated EUR 2 million in criminal assets are expected to be seized, and many witness hearings and house searches will be conducted, securing important evidence to be used at trial. Actions are also taking place in Suriname. (*Click on image to enlarge*).

The case originated in 2014, when the Dutch Fiscal, Information and investigation Service (FIOD) referred an investigation of possible money laundering to Eurojust. The investigation looked into partners of Italian restaurants in Horst and Venray in the Netherlands and showed connections to the Nordrhein-Westfalen region in Germany as well as to criminal activity in Reggio Calabria in southern Italy. The Dutch Desk at Eurojust then proactively encouraged the other countries concerned to look into the case.

The 'Ndrangheta mafia network, which has its base in southern Italy, is known to operate by starting legitimate businesses in other countries as a cover to expand overseas, smuggling drugs, laundering illicit profits and claiming new territories as areas under their control. By splitting the activities per

country, the mafia network aims to exploit legal differences between criminal jurisdictions and to escape attention, since each crime, if only investigated separately, may appear as an isolated act rather than part of an international operation.

The creation of a JIT by the Netherlands, Italy and Germany for Operation Pollino in October 2016 had a catalytic effect on the scale and intensity of the investigation. Essentially a legal framework, a JIT is a platform for judiciary and police from different countries to work directly together in a specific case and systematically exchange operational information. Step by step, the authorities involved in Operation Pollino, including investigative judges, worked very intensively together to fit together the pieces, and pooled their knowledge and creativity in order to establish a joint strategy and uncover the actual magnitude and complexity of the criminal activity of the 'Ndrangheta. The exchange of evidence, which is essential to build solid prosecution cases, has been an important element in preparing today's action. It was the first JIT with the participation of Italy.

The practical support through EU agencies such as Eurojust and Europol has played a crucial role in Operation Pollino. The JIT has been facilitated and financed by Eurojust, which also organised a series of coordination meetings to regularly bring the actors together, support the development of a joint strategy and facilitate the mutual understanding of the different judicial systems at critical junctures of the investigation. Europol has contributed through extensive data analysis in the context of Analysis Project ITOC, which supports cases investigating the criminal activities of mafia-structured OCGs originating in Italy and impacting other Member States.

During the joint action day, prosecutors from the judicial authorities followed the action in real time from the coordination centre at Eurojust, which allows for swift analysis of new data as it is being collected during the action and makes it possible to adapt the strategy as required. Europol has also assisted the Italian police in the field with a mobile office.

Filippo Spiezia, Vice-President of Eurojust and National Member for Italy, said: *'Today, we send a clear message to organised crime groups across Europe. They are not the only ones able to operate across borders; so are Europe's judiciary and law enforcement communities. By working together and using the unique tools at our disposal in the EU, such as the possibility to form a joint investigation team and with the practical support through EU agencies such as Eurojust and Europol, we are able to detect, investigate and prosecute this kind of serious organised crime.'*

As of 11:00 today, the following actions and results have been reported:

**NETHERLANDS:** 5 arrests. Seizures of almost 4 000 kg of cocaine and 140 kg XTC pills. Dutch investigators from FIOD and the Dutch police have also helped to search in Italy and Germany.

*Authorities involved:*

- Fiscal, Information and Investigation Service (FIOD)

- Police National Unit, Dutch National Prosecution Service

**ITALY:** The main focus has been in the regions of Calabria and Catanzaro in southern Italy. There have been 41 arrests.

*Authorities involved:*

- Office of the Public Prosecutor of Reggio Calabria
- Central Operative Service of the State Police (SCO)
- State Police Investigative Department of Reggio Calabria
- Central Service of Investigation of the Guardia di Finanza (SCICO)
- Police Command for financial investigation of Guardia di Finanza (Valutaria GdF)
- Operational anti-drug department of the Guardia di Finanza of Reggio Calabria (GOA)

**GERMANY:** The main focus has been in the western parts of the Nordrhein-Westfalen region due to its proximity to the ARA harbours. There have been 15 arrests (+ 6 in a related operation).

*Authorities involved:*

- Staatsanwaltschaft Duisburg
- Bundeskriminalamt (BKA)
- There has also been close cooperation with other German organised crime investigations, with the Organised Crime Units of the Landeskriminalamt NRW, the Police in Cologne as well as the Offices of the Public Prosecutor in Cologne and Aachen, where coordinated arrests and searches have been executed today.

**BELGIUM:** The main focus has been in Maasmechelen in Limburg. There have been 4 arrests (+ 10 in a related operation).

*Authorities involved:*

- Public Prosecutor's Office Limburg
- Federal Judicial Police, Limburg
- Local Police of Lanaken-Maasmechelen, Limburg

**LUXEMBOURG:** Two suspects have been arrested and the national investigation is ongoing.

*Authorities involved:*

- Police Lëtzebuerg
- Parquet de Luxembourg
- Cabinet d'instruction Luxembourg

**Eurojust Q&A (DE, EN, FR, IT and NL):**

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