

# [Migrant smuggling: Council approves a set of measures to fight smuggling networks](#)

To protect its democratic systems and public debates and in view of the 2019 European elections as well as a number of national and local elections that will be held in Member States by 2020, the EU is presenting today an Action Plan to step up efforts to counter disinformation in Europe and beyond.

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The EU is cracking down on migrant smuggling. Today, the Council approved a comprehensive and operational set of measures with a law enforcement focus to step up the fight against migrant smuggling networks. This follows a call by EU leaders at their meeting in October.

These measures build on ongoing efforts at EU and national level, for example as part of the EU action plan against migrant smuggling (2015-2020). The concrete actions draw on:

- enhanced inter-agency approach both at EU and national level,
- making the best use of synergies between the operational tools available,
- maximising the use of the external assets of the EU,

The objective is to disrupt migrant smuggling networks both inside and outside the EU, taking into account their high level of adaptability and the increased interlinking of different criminal activities (including drug

trafficking, money laundering).

Migrant smugglers draw huge financial benefits by exploiting people and putting their lives at risk. EU leaders called for an end to this business model and today we are taking a step forward in this direction. With increased information sharing, coordinated operational actions and cooperation with third countries we want to ensure that smugglers have no space to act.

*Herbert Kickl, Minister of the Interior of Austria*

## **Enhancing information flows**

The operational and analytical capacities of the European Migrant Smuggling Center (EMSC) at Europol will be increased, so it can better support member states in migrant smuggling investigations. Deepening and expanding the activities of the Information Clearing House at the EMSC is also envisaged.

A stronger link will be established between front line information and information analysis capacities. Exchanging this information will allow for both an improvement in on-the-spot cross-checking in real time and a strengthening of the assessment of irregular migration to and within the EU.

## **Strengthening operational tools**

The fight against migrant smuggling is one of the priority areas of action of the EU policy cycle to fight crime (EMPACT). Building on the operational results so far, the use of the possibilities provided under EMPACT will be intensified.

Furthermore, a joint liaison task force on migrant smuggling will be established within the EMSC. This task force will provide a platform for multilateral, intelligence-led, coordinated actions against key migrant smuggling threats.

The cooperation on the financial investigation component and the judicial component will also be strengthened.

Operational needs-based training will be further made available by CEPOL for border control units, consular offices and other relevant services.

## **Disrupting online communications**

The capacity of the EU internet referral unit within Europol will be strengthened so as to increase the number of referrals of pages to be taken down by online service providers, as well as to map and disrupt the technical infrastructure used by smuggling networks.

## External action

The synergies with EU external action in priority third countries and regions needs to be maximised. This includes strengthening links with CSDP missions and operations and with EU liaison officers in third countries. It also foresees the development of common operational partnerships with third countries, in order to support their law enforcement activities and to improve cooperation.

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## 2018-12-06

### ***Eurojust/Europol joint press release***

6 December 2018

Illegal fireworks are a huge Europe-wide problem. Their unregulated distribution causes considerable safety risks to those shipping and buying them due to their substantial explosive character, as well as millions of euro in tax losses for some economies.

A remarkably high level of cooperation and coordination among judicial, police and customs authorities, and the extensive support of Eurojust and Europol, contributed to the successful dismantling of this sophisticated organised crime group (OCG). Action days in Poland, the Netherlands and Germany in the past three weeks have resulted in 35 OCG members arrested in Poland, nine of whom are still detained, and the seizure of fireworks, the blocking of webshops and more than 150 searches of residences and businesses. Four webshops involved in the sale of the illegal fireworks by the OCG, bombashop.com, ultrasshop.com, psychoeffect.eu and pyrofans.eu, were blocked at the request of the Dutch authorities, and their data were seized.

In Poland, 80 tons of F4 fireworks were seized from a warehouse, an amount large enough to fill four large shipping containers. Unmarked parcels containing illegal fireworks were also intercepted and seized in Poland, the Netherlands and Germany prior to distribution to the buyers, thus avoiding possible harm to innocent people, including postal employees.

The members of the OCG are being investigated by the Polish authorities for participation in a criminal organisation, trafficking in pyrotechnic material and explosives, tax fraud and money laundering. The Polish investigation targeted the OCG, which was active since 2012. The OCG, primarily composed of Polish nationals, was involved in the trafficking of fireworks illegally sold online to clients throughout Europe, and shipped by courier and normal post in unmarked packages. The OCG was suspected to have shipped approximately 1

500 kg of pyrotechnics, including approximately 500 kg of F4 class, every day to different Member States.

✘ The German investigation targeted the buyers of illegal fireworks in Germany, who ordered via one of the webshops without possessing licences for explosives.

During simultaneous house searches of the 50 suspects throughout Germany, customs authorities seized large amounts of pyrotechnics, improvised explosive devices, firearms and ammunition. Several houses required evacuation to ensure that the pyrotechnics and explosives could be removed safely. In addition, 74 allegedly illegal postal shipments, with a gross weight of approximately 400 kg, were detected and checked at courier services. Pyrotechnics inside the shipments were seized. *(Click on image to enlarge).*

The objective of the Dutch investigation was to halt the activities of middlemen and consumers, as well as the distribution of illegal fireworks on behalf of the OCG in the Netherlands. The Dutch authorities blocked Dutch Instagram accounts from which illegal fireworks were sold.

In preparation for the action day, multiple European Investigation Orders (EIOs) were exchanged between Poland, Germany, the Netherlands and France requesting searches of premises and seizures. Eurojust enhanced cooperation between parties and promoted discussions about the goals of the actions. It also supported coordination of the investigations during coordination meetings and facilitated the execution of EIOs.

At Europol, multiple operational meetings were held since 2017. Data from the servers used by the online webshops was analysed, and intelligence packages were shared with all the involved Member States, informing them about suspicious clients who ordered pyrotechnics from these different webshops. Europol experts were sent to Poland to support the police actions there.

Thanks to the success of this action, the flow of illegal fireworks in Europe has been greatly reduced, just in time to interrupt the New Year's buying season.

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## [More protection for workers: Council agrees to reduce the exposure to 5 carcinogens](#)

### **Press contacts**

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The EU is taking further steps to protect workers from exposure to carcinogens. The Council today adopted its position (general approach) on a proposal which will update the existing rules on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work (Directive 2004/37/EC). The aim of the proposal, which was presented by the Commission in April this year, is to reduce the exposure levels for 5 carcinogenic chemical agents – cadmium, beryllium, arsenic acid, formaldehyde and 4,4'-Methylene-bis(2-chloroaniline)(MOCA).

Estimates show that this proposal, when adopted, would in the longer term improve working conditions for over 1 000 000 workers in the EU and should prevent more than 22 000 cases of work-related ill-health. It is a very good example of how the EU is taking concrete steps to protect its citizens.

*Beate Hartinger-Klein, Federal Minister of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection of Austria.*

The proposal, including Council's proposed amendments, sets the following new limits which are in line with new scientific and technical data and evidenced-based practices for measuring exposure levels at the workplace:

- cadmium – 0,001 mg/m<sup>3</sup>. This value will apply after a 7-year transitional period during which the limit value 0,004 mg/m<sup>3</sup> should apply;
- beryllium – 0,0002 mg/m<sup>3</sup>. This value will apply after a 5-year transitional period during which the limit value 0,0006 mg/m<sup>3</sup> should apply;
- arsenic acid – 0,01 mg/m<sup>3</sup>. This value will apply for the copper smelting sector after a 2-year transitional period;
- formaldehyde – 0,37 mg/m<sup>3</sup> for 8-hour exposure and 0,74 mg/m<sup>3</sup> for a short term exposure. These limit values will apply after a 3-year transitional period;
- MOCA – 0,01 mg/m<sup>3</sup> with a skin notation to indicate possible dermal uptake.

With regard to cadmium the Commission shall assess no later than five years from the entry into force of the Directive the option of a further amendment to Directive 2004/37/EC which would add the combination of an airborne occupational exposure limit with a biological limit value. The proposal also allows Member States to introduce at national level more stringent binding limit values and does not prevent them from applying additional measures, such as a biological limit value.

## **Next steps**

The agreement reached by the Council will serve as the basis for negotiations with the European Parliament.

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