

[Coordinated crackdown on 'Ndrangheta mafia in Europe](#)

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5 December 2018



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):

□

Commissioner Moscovici's remarks on the international role of the euro

Bonjour. Pour comprendre le sens de cet exercice, qui a été présenté dans des termes que je partage totalement par Valdis, il faut prendre du recul et regarder les grandes tendances économiques et géopolitiques que nous vivons.

Sur le plan économique, Chine concurrence désormais les Etats-Unis pour le poste ou le rang de première puissance mondiale, poursuivie maintenant par l'Inde. L'Europe, dans ce contexte, doit faire de plus en plus d'efforts pour maintenir sa place dans cette recomposition globale.

Sur le plan monétaire, si le dollar est depuis la fin de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale la principale monnaie de réserve internationale, cela aussi est destiné à changer progressivement avec la montée de la Chine. Et là encore nous devons agir pour préserver et renforcer la place de l'euro sur cet échiquier mondial.

Dès sa création il y a vingt ans, l'euro s'est imposé déjà comme la deuxième monnaie mondiale après le dollar. C'est une position beaucoup plus importante que celles qui avaient été occupées jadis par toutes les anciennes monnaies nationales réunies, ce qui est un argument de plus pour croire en notre devise européenne. Si les années de crise ont affaibli le poids relatif de l'euro, elles n'ont pas fondamentalement affecté sa place dans l'économie mondiale.

Mais l'euro pourrait beaucoup mieux faire encore et mieux refléter la force économique de la zone euro et la puissance commerciale de l'Union européenne. Une utilisation internationale plus large de l'euro bénéficierait à la fois aux citoyens européens et aux entreprises européennes. Ces dernières profiteraient d'un coût et d'un risque moindres dans le commerce international, d'un accès plus fiable au financement grâce à des marchés financiers plus intégrés et plus liquides et d'une exposition réduite aux actions en justice des pays tiers (par le biais de sanctions extraterritoriales) dont nous ne pouvons pas subir passivement la loi. La communication d'aujourd'hui vise à corriger progressivement cette situation.

Le renforcement du rôle international de l'euro permettrait d'accroître la capacité de l'Europe à façonner les grands événements mondiaux. Il nous permettrait de tirer profit de la souveraineté de la zone euro dans le système monétaire international et à améliorer aussi la résistance du système financier international en élargissant les choix offerts aux opérateurs de marché à travers le monde. En contrepartie, cela permettrait aussi à l'Union européenne assumerait des responsabilités plus importantes au niveau mondial.

Nous sommes aussi lucides. Certains facteurs déterminants empêchent l'euro de réaliser son plein potentiel à l'international. A 20 ans, notre monnaie

unique est déjà forte mais est encore jeune. Il existe encore d'importants effets de réseau qui continuent à favoriser le recours au dollar.

Mais il y a aussi des raisons plus banales : Pour certaines transactions, le coût d'utilisation du dollar est inférieur au coût d'utilisation de l'euro. Aussi, la préférence des opérateurs pour le dollar tient à la profondeur et à la liquidité des marchés financiers et des capitaux américains par rapport à ceux de la zone euro, ainsi qu'à la disponibilité d'infrastructures de marché et de systèmes de paiement attractifs, plus sans doute que les nôtres.

Par conséquent, un certain nombre de conditions interdépendantes doivent être remplies et des mesures doivent être prises pour rendre l'euro plus attractif à l'international :

Premièrement, comme Valdis l'a dit, nous devons poursuivre nos travaux pour renforcer les fondamentaux de l'économie de la zone euro et ça passe par l'achèvement de l'Union économique et monétaire, notamment l'Union bancaire – nous avons fait des progrès sur ce plan lors du dernier Eurogroupe, mais il faut faire beaucoup plus – et l'Union des marchés financiers. La disponibilité d'un plus grand nombre d'obligations libellées en euro et mieux notées rendrait notre monnaie unique plus attrayante pour les investisseurs internationaux. Le Sommet de la zone euro la semaine prochaine constituera une étape importante pour progresser dans cette direction.

Deuxièmement, nous proposons de réfléchir, en concertation avec les acteurs pertinents, à des actions concrètes pour améliorer le fonctionnement et la structure des marchés financiers. Valdis a mentionné certaines de nos initiatives dans ce sens.

Enfin, nous souhaitons, et nous devons, encourager les acteurs publics et privés du marché de l'énergie à revoir leurs pratiques actuelles en ce qui concerne l'utilisation de l'euro. Miguel vous en parlera dans un instant.

[Company law adapted to the digital era : Council position agreed](#)

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The EU is modernising company law rules in order to make them fit for purpose

in the digital era. Member state ambassadors meeting today in Coreper agreed on new rules which will facilitate the use of digital tools and online processes in a company's contacts with public authorities throughout its lifecycle.

The new rules ensure that:

- companies are able to register limited liability companies, set up new branches and file documents for companies and their branches to the business register fully online;
- national model templates and information on national requirements are made available online and in a language broadly understood by the majority of cross-border users;
- rules on fees for online formalities are transparent and applied in a non-discriminatory manner;
- fees charged for the online registration of companies do not exceed the overall costs incurred by the member state concerned;
- the 'once-only' principle, whereby company would need to submit the same information to public authorities only once, applies;
- documents submitted by companies are stored and exchanged by national registers in machine-readable and searchable formats;
- more information about companies is made available to all interested parties free of charge in the business registers.

At the same time, the proposed directive sets the necessary safeguards against fraud and abuse in online procedures, including mandatory control of the identity and legal capacity of persons setting up the company and the possibility of requiring physical presence before a competent authority. It maintains the involvement of notaries or lawyers in company law procedures as long as these procedures can be completed fully online. It also foresees an exchange of information between member states on disqualified directors in order to detect fraud.

Next steps

Today's agreement opens the way for negotiations with the European Parliament for the rapid adoption of the proposed directive.

Background

According to figures provided by the Commission, there are around 24 million companies in the EU, out of which approximately 80% are limited liability companies. Around 98-99% of limited liability companies are small and medium-sized enterprises which would be most directly impacted by these improvements.

The directive does not harmonise substantive requirements for setting up companies or doing business across the EU. It is without prejudice to rules laid down in certain areas, such as the posting of workers, coordination of social security systems and road transport, to ensure that undertakings do not improperly or fraudulently take advantage of Treaty freedoms through

letter-box companies which do not genuinely carry out substantial activities.

The proposed directive complements the existing rules on EU company law as codified in directive (EU) 2017/1132. It is one of the two proposals tabled by the Commission in April 2018 for the modernisation of EU company law. It also complements and builds upon the recently adopted Single Digital Gateway regulation, which covers the general registration of business activity via online means except for the constitution of limited liability companies.

The agreed text will appear on this page on 6 December 2018.

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[Une Europe qui protège: l'UE renforce son action contre la désinformation](#)

Roaming charges ended in the European Union on 15 June 2017. Europeans travelling within EU countries will 'Roam Like at Home' and pay domestic prices for roaming calls, SMS and data. ...

On 23 June 2016 citizens of the United Kingdom (UK) voted to leave the European Union (EU). On 29 March 2017 the UK formally notified the European Council of its intention to leave the EU by...

Over the past 20 years, the European Union has put in place some of the highest common asylum standards in the world. And in the past two years, European migration policy has advanced in leaps and...

'Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity.' Robert Schuman 9 May 1950 On 25 March 2017, ...

In response to the illegal annexation of Crimea and deliberate destabilisation of a neighbouring sovereign country, the EU has imposed restrictive measures against the Russian Federation. ...

Enlargement is the process whereby countries join the EU. Since it was founded in 1957, the EU has grown from 6 member countries to 28. Any European country that respects the principles of liberty, ...

[A Europe that Protects: The EU steps up action against disinformation](#)

Taking stock of the progress made so far and following up on the call made by European leaders in [June 2018](#) to protect the Union's democratic systems, the European Commission and the High Representative are setting out concrete measures to tackle disinformation, including the creation of a Rapid Alert System and close monitoring of the implementation of the Code of Practice signed by the online platforms. [The Action Plan](#) also foresees an increase of resources devoted to the issue.

High Representative/Vice President Federica **Mogherini** said: *"Healthy democracy relies on open, free and fair public debate. It's our duty to protect this space and not allow anybody to spread disinformation that fuels hatred, division, and mistrust in democracy. As the European Union, we've decided to act together and reinforce our response, to promote our principles, to support the resilience of our societies, within our borders and in the neighbourhood. It's the European way to respond to one of the main challenges of our times."*

Andrus **Ansip**, Vice-President responsible for the Digital Single Market, said: *"We need to be united and join our forces to protect our democracies against disinformation. We have seen attempts to interfere in elections and referenda, with evidence pointing to Russia as a primary source of these campaigns. To address these threats, we propose to improve coordination with Member States through a Rapid Alert System, reinforce our teams exposing disinformation, increase support for media and researchers, and ask online platforms to deliver on their commitments. Fighting disinformation requires a collective effort."*

Stepping up detection, response and awareness

The Action Plan – prepared in close cooperation also with Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Věra **Jourová**; Commissioner for Security Union Julian **King** and Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya **Gabriel** – focuses on four areas key to effectively build up the EU's capabilities and strengthen cooperation between Member States and the EU:

- **Improved detection:** Strategic Communication Task Forces and the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell in the European External Action Service (EEAS), as well as the EU delegations in the neighbourhood countries will be reinforced with significant additional specialised staff and data analysis tools. The EEAS' strategic communication budget to address disinformation and raise awareness about its adverse impact is expected to more than double, from €1.9 million in 2018 to €5 million in 2019. EU Member States should complement these measures by reinforcing their own means to deal with disinformation.

- **Coordinated response:** A dedicated Rapid Alert System will be set up among the EU institutions and Member States to facilitate the sharing of data and assessments of disinformation campaigns and to provide alerts on disinformation threats in real time. The EU institutions and Member States will also focus on proactive and objective communication on Union values and policies.
- **Online platforms and industry:** The signatories of the Code of Practice should swiftly and effectively implement the commitments made under the Code of Practice, focusing on actions that are urgent for the European elections in 2019. This includes in particular ensuring transparency of political advertising, stepping up efforts to close active fake accounts, labelling non-human interactions (messages spread automatically by 'bots') and cooperating with fact-checkers and academic researchers to detect disinformation campaigns and make fact-checked content more visible and widespread. The Commission, with the help of the European group of regulators in charge of audio-visual media services, will ensure a close and continuous monitoring of the implementation of the commitments.
- **Raising awareness and empowering citizens:** In addition to targeted awareness campaigns, the EU institutions and Member States will promote media literacy through dedicated programmes. Support will be provided to national multidisciplinary teams of independent fact-checkers and researchers to detect and expose disinformation campaigns across social networks.

Finally, the Commission is today also reporting on the progress made in tackling online disinformation since the presentation of its Communication in [April 2018](#).

Next steps

The European Commission and the High Representative will develop and implement the measures set out in the Action Plan, in close cooperation with Member States and the European Parliament.

With a view to the European elections, the Rapid Alert System will be set up by March 2019. This will be complemented by further strengthening relevant resources.

The signatories of the Code of Practice will have to provide the first implementation update to the Commission by the end of 2018, which the Commission will then publish in January 2019. Between January and May, the online platforms will have to report to the Commission on a monthly basis. The Commission will also carry out a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the Code of Practice in its first 12 months. Should the implementation and the impact of the Code of Practice prove unsatisfactory, the Commission may propose further measures, including of a regulatory nature.

Background

The European Union has been actively tackling disinformation since 2015.

Following a decision of the [European Council in March 2015](#), in order to “challenge Russia’s ongoing disinformation campaigns”, the [East StratCom Task Force](#) in the European External Action Service (EEAS) was set up. The Task Force, together with the relevant Commission services, focuses on effectively communicating the EU’s policies towards its eastern neighbourhood; strengthening the overall media environment in the eastern neighbourhood, including providing support for media freedom and strengthening independent media; and improving the EU’s capacity to forecast, address and raise awareness of pro-Kremlin disinformation activities.

In 2016, the [Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats](#) was adopted, followed by the [Joint Communication on increasing resilience and bolstering capabilities to address hybrid threats](#) in 2018.

In [April 2018](#), the Commission outlined a European approach and self-regulatory tools to tackle disinformation online, including an EU-wide Code of Practice against Disinformation, support for an independent network of fact-checkers, and tools to stimulate quality journalism. On 16 October, the [Code of Practice](#) was signed by Facebook, Google, Twitter and Mozilla as well as the trade association representing online platforms and trade associations representing the advertising industry and advertisers.

In his [2018 State of the Union Address](#), President Juncker also put forward a set of concrete measures to make sure that next year’s European Parliament elections are organised in a free, fair and secure manner. The measures include greater transparency in online political advertisements and the possibility to impose sanctions for the illegal use of personal data in order to deliberately influence the outcome of the European elections.

For More Information