

12 detained in Poland in gun smuggling crackdown

With the active support of Europol, the Polish Border Guard (Straż Graniczna), together with the Internal Security Agency (Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego) and the National Police (Policja) has seized close to a hundred firearms in raids tackling a gun-smuggling gang.

The Polish authorities found the weapons in a series of house searches in the regions of Świętokrzyskie and Łódzkie Voivodeship and charged 12 suspects – all Polish nationals between 32 and 60 – for their involvement in this illegal gun-running operation.

The organised crime gang under investigation smuggled weapons illegally from Slovakia to Poland, Russia and Ukraine.

The 96 seized firearms include revolvers, pistols, automatic rifles and hand machine guns. Several thousand rounds of ammunition of different calibre and one hand grenade were also confiscated as a result of this action day.

Additionally, over EUR 50 000 worth of cash was found during the house searches, alongside 14 marijuana plants and some amphetamine.

The case was conducted in close cooperation with Europol, which provided continuous intelligence development and analysis to support the field investigators.

This action day falls in the framework of a much larger two-year long investigation led by the Polish Border Guard which, besides this action day, has resulted so far in the seizure of close to 200 firearms, including so-called 'Flobert' guns and some 2 700 pieces of ammunition. Fifteen other individuals – 9 Ukrainian nationals, 1 Russian national and 5 Polish nationals had already been arrested.

The evidence seized during the course of this particular action is now being analysed to identify further investigative leads across Europe.

This action day was carried out in the framework of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT).



In 2010 the European Union set up a [four-year Policy Cycle](#) to ensure greater continuity in the fight against serious international and organised crime. In 2017 the Council of the EU decided to continue the EU Policy Cycle for the 2018 – 2021 period. It aims to tackle the most significant threats posed by organised and serious international crime to the EU. This is achieved by improving and strengthening cooperation between the relevant services of EU Member States, institutions and agencies, as well as non-EU countries and organisations, including the private sector where relevant. [Illicit firearms trafficking](#) is one of the priorities for the Policy Cycle.

[EIOPA publishes report on artificial intelligence governance principles](#)

The European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA) published today a report from its consultative expert group on digital ethics setting out artificial intelligence (AI) governance principles for an ethical and trustworthy AI in the European insurance sector.

The report builds on recent international and EU developments in the area of digitalisation and AI. EIOPA convened the consultative expert group so that a wide range of stakeholders could work together identifying the opportunities and risks associated with the growing use of AI in insurance, including exploring possible limits that might be needed.

The report highlights the proliferation of AI in insurance. For instance, AI allows insurance companies to carry out more granular risk assessments and pricing practices, increasingly efficient claims management processes, and enables insurance companies to fight against fraud more effectively.

Benefits such as prediction accuracy, automation, new products and services, and cost reductions can be remarkable. However, ensuring fairness, non-discrimination, transparency and explainability can be challenging: there is work for firms to address these challenges.

The issues raised are of critical importance in the face of the digital transformation currently underway in the sector. Developing a sound AI governance framework is therefore essential for a well-functioning, trusted and financially inclusive insurance sector.

The report aims to help insurance companies when putting in place risk-based and proportionate measures, providing guidance on how to implement key principles in practice throughout the lifecycle of an AI application. The guidance is non-binding and illustrative.

EIOPA welcomes the findings from the consultative expert group, and believes they provide a highly valuable starting point for better establishing the boundaries for the appropriate use of AI in insurance. EIOPA will use these

findings to identify possible supervisory initiatives in this area taking into account the on-going developments at EU level related to digitalisation and AI.

[Download the report](#)

Background

In September 2019, EIOPA established the Consultative Expert Group as a follow-up of its [thematic review on the use of Big Data Analytics in motor and health insurance](#), with a mandate to examine AI in insurance from an ethical perspective. The thematic review identified a strong trend towards data-driven business models in the European insurance market. Data has become a very valuable resource and the availability of data continues to increase. Technology has also advanced and this has enabled the use of AI to gain more insight in consumer behaviour. The COVID-19 crisis has also accelerated this trend.

The ethical issues surrounding digitalisation and AI go beyond the insurance sector. EIOPA recognises that given the large amounts of data used by insurance companies across all parts of the insurance value chain, it is essential that insurance companies address the wider implications of the use of AI to ensure fairness and good consumer outcomes.

[Pesticides worth up to € 80 million in criminal profits seized during operation Silver Axe VI](#)



Between 13 January and 25 April 2021, Europol coordinated the sixth edition of operation Silver Axe targeting the trade in counterfeit and illegal

pesticides. The joint action involved law enforcement authorities from 35 countries (all 27 EU Member States and 8 third party countries). The global operation was supported by the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO), the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), the European Commission's DG SANTE, the European Crop Protection Association (ECPA) and CropLife Europe.

During the operation, law enforcement authorities targeted the sale of counterfeits, banned products and unregulated imports – both online and offline. They carried out inspections on land and sea borders, inland marketplaces, parcel service providers and online marketplaces. The abuse in the trade of illegal pesticides varies from trafficking counterfeit or mislabelled products to irregular imports of banned substances such as chlorpyrifos, which was specifically targeted during Silver Axe VI. While Asia and South Asia remain the major source regions for illegal pesticides, Europol has noticed an increase in their online sale.

Silver Axe VI resulted in:

- 12 arrests (7 in Italy and 5 in Spain);
- 763 infringements reported;
- 268 seizures, including:
 - 1 203 tonnes of illegal pesticides in total, including:
 - 100 tonnes of counterfeit pesticides seized at seller, manufacturer and logistics companies;
 - 82 tonnes of pesticides suspected of being counterfeited and currently under investigation.

Illegal pesticides carry a high environmental cost

The pesticide industry is highly regulated, and pesticides are among the most regulated products in the world. Unregulated substances can be extremely dangerous for the environment and human health. The use of cheaper illegal and substandard products has led to the devastation of fields and other ecosystems, which has caused serious harm to the world's biggest pollinators: bees. For example, a case during operational activities in the framework of Silver Axe IV uncovered how the unregulated use of neonicotinoid, contained in a non-approved product, led to the death of bees raised in the area. Although the trees that the product was used on did not have flowers, their leaves extracted sugar, attracting and poisoning the nearby bees.

Catherine De Bolle, Europol's Executive Director, said: "Over the past six years, Operation Silver Axe has brought together an increasing number of law enforcement authorities and partners against those putting our public health and security at risk. The impressive seizure of over 1 000 tonnes of illegal pesticides clearly demonstrate that, together, we can better ensure the safety of EU citizens and protect the environment today and for the future."

Christian Archambeau, EUIPO's Executive Director, said: "This is another example of how national and EU enforcement authorities and agencies working together can make a difference by taking off the market counterfeit,

unregulated and often dangerous products that not only harm consumers but also have a deadly impact on the environment.”

Ville Itälä, OLAF’s Director-General, said: “OLAF is proud to have played its part in the ongoing fight against illegal pesticides. Our unique experience in identifying and monitoring suspicious shipments and activities has once again contributed to the excellent results of Operation Silver Axe, helping to keep these dangerous products off the EU market and protecting people and the planet.”

Géraldine Kutas, CropLife Europe’s Director-General, said: “Cooperation between industry and Europol on illicit pesticides is more vital than ever before. In order to deliver on the Farm 2 Fork objectives, we need to ensure there are no counterfeit and illegal pesticides entering the European market. To do this, we need to continue raising awareness for both farmers and the legitimate distribution channel to make sure they reject criminal offerings that jeopardise the sustainable production of food.”

Total of 3 771 tonnes of illegal pesticides seized since Silver Axe I

Silver Axe was initially developed to respond in a coordinated way to the dangerous trafficking of illegal pesticides. The efforts of the public and private sector have led to the seizure of a total of 3 771 tonnes of illegal pesticides during the past six Silver Axe operations. Europol coordinated the operation, facilitated the information exchange and provided operational and strategic analytical support.

Participating countries

EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, Spain.

Third party countries: Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Norway and the United States.

[Media advisory – European Council of 24 and 25 June 2021](#)



We are working to ensure a gradual, smooth and safe re-opening for the media to our Council premises.

In order to comply with COVID-19 safety measures in place, a limited number of media representatives will be allowed on site to cover the European Council of 24-25 June in person, in accordance with the physical space available and current social distancing rules¹. The press conferences held in the Justus Lipsius Press Room will be run in hybrid mode and questions will be taken from the room and from journalists connected remotely.

Registration

Media representatives wishing to cover the meeting in person are required to express their interest via the [online form](#) on Council website.

- The deadline to register is **Monday 21 June 2021, 18:00**.

Media representatives are strongly advised to apply as soon as possible to allow for sufficient time to process the requests.

Accreditation

Should the number of requests exceed 70, the Council press centre will proceed with a selection of the media representatives accredited to be present physically on-site. After discussion with API-IPA, the selection will be made by applying the following three criteria in sequence until maximum capacity is reached (priority will be given to journalists holding a European Council annual badge²):

- Representation of all EU 27 member states
- Brussels-based main international media and agencies
- A random selection of European Council accredited journalists

We believe that such a model will ensure a good balance of having all member states represented, a wide coverage through big agencies and media outlets, as well as allow for a significant number of totally randomly selected Brussels-accredited journalists.

The doorstep area in the Europa Building will be accessible only to a specific media pool, due to the constraints imposed by the available space and the respect of the social distancing rules. In order to maximise opportunities for journalists, priority for accessing the doorsteps will be given to reporters (i.e. journalists asking questions) without an accompanying camera or technical teams. Host camera and sound services will be available in the area.

Media representatives that will be accredited will receive a confirmation e-mail by Tuesday 22 June at 19:00. In order to make the best use of the capacity available, please inform the press centre immediately should you finally decide not to attend in person, via e-mail to [\[email protected\]](#).

Press conferences

The joint press conference(s) in the JL Press Room will be run in hybrid

mode: with a physical presence of journalists in the room and via the usual videoconference platform (Zoom). Connection information will be shared via instant messaging (Signal) or email.

Except for a limited number of photographers/camera(wo)men, no physical access will be possible for national press conferences. They will be all available in video conference (Zoom).

Sanitary requirements

Physical access to the Council media centre will only be granted upon meeting one of the following three conditions:

- a negative PCR test, taken no more than 72 hours before the start of the meeting,
- a certificate by a medical doctor stating that the person has recovered from COVID-19,
- a proof of full vaccination more than 14 days before the day of the meeting.

Media representatives are required to download, fill and sign a [sworn statement](#) certifying that they fulfil one of the conditions listed above. The sworn statement must be sent to [\[email protected\]](#) no later than Wednesday 23 June at 21:00. No test result or certificate should be sent to the GSC.

Press materials

Videos and photos of the Summit will be available on:

¹ A minimum distance of 1.5m must be kept at all times as per the rules currently in application in Belgium (<https://www.info-coronavirus.be/en/faq/>).

² If you applied for the annual badge in 2021 and you have received a positive acknowledgement from Council press centre, please collect it in time before 23/6.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

[EU asylum agency: Council agrees extended mandate for negotiations with](#)

the European Parliament

EU ambassadors today extended the Council's negotiating mandate on the EU asylum agency regulation.

The proposed regulation aims to improve the application of asylum policy within the EU, by turning the current European asylum support office (EASO) into a fully-fledged agency. This agency will be responsible for improving the functioning of the common European asylum system, by providing enhanced operational and technical assistance to member states and by contributing to more convergence in the assessment of applications for international protection.



Today's mandate for negotiations is an important step towards our common goal of building a fairer and more efficient asylum system. A fully fledged EU asylum agency will be able to provide swift operational support wherever it is most needed and contribute to increase mutual trust among member states.

Eduardo Cabrita, Portuguese Minister for Home Affairs

The EU asylum agency regulation strengthens the current EASO mandate and facilitates the deployment of experts to member states that have requested operational support. The new mandate increases the agency's support to cooperation among member states and third countries, thereby also contributing to the EU overall external dimension. The revised mandate takes into account that discussions on a new migration and asylum pact are ongoing and defers the entry into application of the monitoring mechanism to a later stage.

Background

In May and June 2016, the European Commission presented seven legislative proposals, including a proposal on the EU asylum agency, to improve the functioning of the common European asylum system.

The Council adopted an initial partial negotiating mandate for the EU asylum agency proposal on 20 December 2016, and negotiations with the European Parliament took place in the following months. On 28 June 2017 the Council Presidency and the European Parliament reached a broad political agreement. Work then continued at technical level and on 6 December 2017, EU ambassadors took note of the provisional agreement.

In September 2018, the European Commission presented an amended proposal for the EU asylum agency regulation, building on the provisional agreement reached in 2017. Work on this proposal started both within the Council and

the European Parliament. However, as part of its migration and asylum pact proposals in September 2020, the European Commission maintained its 2016 proposal on the EU asylum agency regulation, and discussions on it were relaunched.