

Joint operation against drug trafficking in Finland and the Netherlands

The Hague, 8 March 2018

Since October 2017, Eurojust has been supporting the Finnish authorities in one of the largest investigations of drug trafficking in Finland, and especially in the region of Pirkanmaa, from which most of the Finnish suspects originate.

A larger organised crime group (OCG) established both in Finland and the Netherlands, which has been trafficking drugs, mainly amphetamine, in those countries, was dismantled by the Finnish and Dutch authorities. The estimated value of the drugs (approximately 50 kg) amounts to EUR 2.8 million.

Eurojust facilitated the simultaneous execution of European Investigation Orders and [European Arrest Warrants](#) and assisted in the development of coordinated strategies for the joint operations of the Finnish, Dutch, German and Swedish national authorities, which were facilitated through a [coordination centre](#) established at Eurojust. Without Eurojust's intervention, cross-border actions would have been very difficult to perform.

The German and Swedish national authorities supported the Finnish authorities' investigation and cooperated on the basis of mutual legal assistance requests. In the Netherlands, suspects were arrested and house searches were conducted by the International Legal Assistance Centre (IRC) of Limburg. During these actions, important evidence was obtained for the Finnish authorities. Through the close and active cooperation of the national authorities with Eurojust and Europol, 19 members of the OCG were detained in Finland. A total of 37 individuals (23 in Finland, 14 in the Netherlands) are suspected of five aggravated drug offences.

In addition to drug trafficking, the investigation focused on seven suspected money laundering offences related to the trafficking of drugs between Finland and the Netherlands.

The National Member for Finland at Eurojust, Piia Vottonen, stated: *'The active cooperation between Eurojust and the national authorities at the Eurojust coordination centre enabled the success in the case. Eurojust dealt with the judicial aspects within its competence, organised a coordination meeting to discuss the details of the case and set up a coordination centre to support the coordinated actions.'*

Our core task at Eurojust is to assist judicial authorities in dealing with cross-border criminal cases. In this case, as in so many others, the Finnish

authorities took on-the-spot investigative measures during the action day at the coordination centre, which provided the necessary judicial support to the investigation.'

EU and Ukrainian local governments establish partnerships to support decentralisation reform

The European Union increased its support for local and regional authorities in Ukraine on 8 March, with the launch of five partnerships between Ukrainian and EU regions and cities. The relationships will see Estonian, German, Hungarian, Lithuanian and Polish communities share their experience in areas identified as priorities by their Ukrainian partners – drawing up economic-development plans, supporting rural areas, helping small and medium-sized enterprises, boosting tourism, and increasing transparency.

The initiative is part of a broader effort by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) to support the decentralisation of power in Ukraine, a process that began in April 2014 and that has seen a consolidation of local governments, an increase in their funding and the transfer of greater powers to them.

The partnerships will see local officials and experts visit each other's communities to identify objectives, analyse challenges, and implement plans over the course of the next three years or more. Four of the five EU communities involved have representatives in the European Committee of the Regions. Financial support comes from the European Commission, with GIZ, the German development agency, providing day-to-day technical support.

Karl-Heinz Lambertz , the President of the CoR, said: "Local and regional governments are working together to encourage decentralisation and increase capacity-building by providing practical support to communities in Ukraine. These partnerships will help Ukrainian communities emulate the progress of EU towns and regions that have prospered from greater control over local services. Strengthening relations and sharing good policy is in the interests of local communities and will ensure a securer, more prosperous European neighbourhood."

Sergey Chernov , Chairman of Kharkiv Regional Council and President of the Ukrainian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, said: "These partnerships are a very welcome initiative that will help the decentralisation process. Ukrainian communities are gaining more power and funding, but local politicians need very specific support as they learn how to use that power to the best effect for their communities. This is also a show of solidarity by communities – in eastern Germany, Estonia, Hungary,

Lithuania, and Poland – **that have made a similar journey away from very centralised state management.”**

The city of Rakvere in Estonia will work with Vesele in southern Ukraine on energy efficiency and sustainable local development, while the Wielkopolska region has teamed up with Kharkiv region in north-eastern Ukraine to assist rural development. Shyrokye in the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in eastern Ukraine will be teamed with Barleben from Saxony-Anhalt in Germany, while the western Ukrainian region of Khmelnytskyi has asked Szabolcs Szatmár Bereg County in Hungary to help develop green rural tourism. Zarasai municipality in Lithuania will share its experience of improving transparency and involving local citizens in decision-making processes with Chemerivtsi, a town in the foothills of the Carpathian mountains.

On the same day, representatives from the Ukrainian regions also attended a meeting in Brussels of the Ukraine task-force created by the CoR, at which the keynote speech was given by **Vyacheslav Nehoda**, Ukraine’s First Deputy Minister for Regional Development, Building and Housing. Other speakers included **Marc Cools**, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, **Tibor Szanyi** MEP, deputy chair of the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee, and senior EU officials – including **Peter Wagner**, Head of the European Commission’s Support Group for Ukraine, and **Dirk Schuebel**, head of the Eastern Partnership division in the European External Action Service.

Notes to the editor:

- The European Commission is providing funding through its [U-LEAD programme](#). GIZ, the German development agency, is running the programme on behalf of the EU. **Bastian Veigel**, GIZ Programme Director of U-LEAD, spoke at the launch of the initiative in Brussels on 8 March.
- The European Committee of the Regions created a Ukraine task-force in 2015. Ukrainian local and regional authorities are also represented in [CORLEAP](#), the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership, which was established by the CoR in 2011 to foster contact and collaboration between EU cities and regions and peers in the six members of the EU’s Eastern Partnership: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.
- In 2016, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) launched peer-to-peer [partnerships with Libyan cities](#), including Tripoli, Benghazi, Ghariyan, Tobruk, Sabha, Sirte, Zintan and Zliten. Federica Mogherini, the EU’s foreign-policy chief, has described the CoR’s cooperation with Libyan cities as an example of “city diplomacy at its best”, arguing that “municipalities can play a central role in the reconstruction of Libya, and we need [the CoR] to keep engaging with them”.

- The [Mayors for Economic Growth](#) initiative was launched by the European Union in 2017. It offers technical support to local governments in the Eastern Partnership countries – Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – that wish to develop economic-development plans. The objective is to help municipalities catalyse economic growth at the local level. The CoR has urged local governments in the [Eastern Partnership](#) to take the opportunity to access EU expertise and to develop peer-to-peer relationships.

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[Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar](#)

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Go raibh maith agat, Taoiseach. I heard that the last days were particularly difficult in Ireland because of the severe weather, particularly for people in the countryside. But let me reassure you that I have not come here to chill the air, but rather to warm it up. I may be from the East, but I am *not* a Beast.

I have come to Dublin to consult with the Taoiseach and discuss Ireland's concerns on several important issues ahead of the European Council in two weeks. The European Union is a family of free nations, linked by values. For sure, we may not always be in agreement on everything. But in times of trouble, families come together and stand with each other. For the EU27, this is especially true when we talk about Brexit.

In December, also with the active participation of the Taoiseach, we addressed the most difficult issues resulting from the UK's departure in

2019. Without the progress achieved in December, moving to the second phase of negotiations would not have been possible. But we also have to be clear that any backsliding on the commitments made so far would create a risk to further progress in Brexit negotiations. This applies also to the question of avoiding a hard border.

When I was in London last week, I heard very critical comments by Prime Minister May, and others, about the way the Irish border issue was presented in the draft Withdrawal Agreement.

We know today that the UK government rejects: “a customs and regulatory border down the Irish Sea”; the EU Single Market and the customs union. While we must respect this position, we also expect the UK to propose a specific and realistic solution to avoid a hard border. As long as the UK doesn’t present such a solution, it is very difficult to imagine substantive progress in Brexit negotiations. If in London someone assumes that the negotiations will deal with other issues first, before moving to the Irish issue, my response would be: Ireland first.

Next month marks the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, ratified by large majorities North and South of the border. We must recognise the democratic decision taken by Britain to leave the EU in 2016, just as we must recognise the democratic decision made on the island of Ireland in 1998 with all its consequences. The risk of destabilising the fragile peace process must be avoided at all costs. So we will be firm on this.

Yesterday in Luxembourg, I presented my draft guidelines to shape our future relationship with the UK after Brexit. Also yesterday, the UK Chancellor made a speech, in the City of London, arguing for a bespoke deal or an ambitious FTA covering financial services. So let me refer to this issue of such great interest to London.

In the FTA we can offer trade in goods, with the aim of covering all sectors, subject to zero tariffs and no quantitative restrictions. But services are not about tariffs. Services are about common rules, common supervision, and common enforcement. To ensure a level playing field. To ensure the integrity of the Single Market. And ultimately also to ensure financial stability. This is why we cannot offer the same in services as we can offer in goods. And it’s also why FTAs don’t have detailed rules for financial services. We should all be clear that also when it comes to financial services, life will be different after Brexit.

I also heard the Chancellor’s words about financial services being “very much in the mutual interest” of the UK and EU. I fully respect the Chancellor’s competence in defining what’s in the UK’s interest. I would, however, ask to allow us to define what’s in the EU’s interest.

Finally, let me add that during my visit in Luxembourg yesterday, I experienced what European solidarity with Ireland means. As you know, every country has its own problems resulting from Brexit. So does Luxembourg. But one of the first issues raised by Prime Minister Bettel in our conversation, was the issue of our common position regarding Ireland. Since my last visit

here in Dublin, I have spoken to virtually every EU leader, and every one of them – without exception – declared, just like Prime Minister Bettel did yesterday, that among their priorities are: protecting the peace process, and avoiding a hard border. The EU stands by Ireland. This is a matter between the EU27 and UK, not Ireland and the UK. Thank you.

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Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with President of Georgia, Giorgi Margvelashvili

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I am very happy to welcome again President Margvelashvili to Brussels. You know how I value your visits here and our talks and cooperation. It's not only a pleasure; first of all I really appreciate how effective, how efficient your country is, and you are as a President.

EU-Georgia relations are strong and we enjoy an excellent partnership. The accomplishment of the visa-free regime and the increase in bilateral trade are some of the most visible examples of our good and expanding cooperation over the past year.

The implementation of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area is bringing tangible results to the citizens of Georgia, contributing to political and economic stability. The European Union will continue to support Georgia's reforms.

With regard to the visa-free regime, I welcome the commitment of the Georgian authorities to continue working with EU Member States to make sure that it functions properly.

Georgia is a frontrunner in the Eastern Partnership and the EU very much appreciated Georgia's constructive and active support to making last year's Summit a success. In this context, we also discussed the future of EU-Georgia relations, including the Georgian government's pragmatic proposals for advancing integration and cooperation with the European Union. We will work

to make these ideas more concrete in the coming months.

During our meeting I reassured the President that the EU remains fully committed to the conflict resolution efforts and support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders. We are concerned about attempts at a creeping annexation of the two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The recent tragic death of Georgian citizen Archil Tatunashvili and the detention of two others in South Ossetia, was a sad reminder of the costs entailed by conflict. Thank you.

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