

Trafficking for sexual exploitation: Bulgarian OCG dismantled

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□An organised crime group (OCG) operating in the Sliven region of Bulgaria was dismantled following Eurojust's coordination of five investigations of trafficking of human beings (THB) for the purpose of sexual exploitation of Bulgarian women to the Netherlands and Belgium, as well as money laundering.

These five investigations resulted in two separate international operations, Operation Palma and Operation Leerdam, and respectively the establishment of two joint investigation teams (JITs), which were set up and coordinated as well as financially supported by Eurojust.

OPERATION PALMA

Operation Palma was initiated by the Dutch authorities in 2013, investigating criminal activity of trafficking of human beings that took place between 2003 and 2010. Following the first coordination meeting at Eurojust in November 2015, the authorities of Bulgaria and the Netherlands set up a JIT in January 2016 to coordinate their investigative efforts. Within the framework of this JIT, between 4 and 11 October 2016, coordinated operations were carried out in Sliven, Bulgaria, and Utrecht and Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Two suspects were detained in Bulgaria, one of them on the basis of an European Arrest Warrant (EAW) issued by Prosecutors Office Utrecht and the other one for money laundering offences of large scale. At the same time in the Netherlands another suspect was arrested. During these coordinated operations a great number of witnesses were questioned in the Netherlands, Belgium and in Bulgaria (in Bulgaria by mixed Bulgarian/Dutch police-teams).

Searches and seizures were conducted in two different towns in Bulgaria. Photos and documents were seized, and the Bulgarian court imposed freezing orders on real estate and vehicle. The Dutch police is preparing a financial report concerning the illegally obtained profits by the main suspect in the Dutch case.

OPERATION LEERDAM

In November 2015, the Bulgarian authorities requested the support of Eurojust in another ongoing Dutch investigation, called Operation Leerdam, for trafficking of Bulgarian women to The Netherlands and Belgium.

Eurojust was instrumental in detecting links between the investigations carried out by the Bulgarian and Dutch authorities within the framework of Operation Palma and Operation Leerdam, and another ongoing investigation in Belgium on sexual exploitation in Antwerp and Brussels of victims of Bulgarian nationality.

In February 2016, Eurojust organised a joint coordination meeting during

which prosecutors, investigators and police officers from Belgium, Bulgaria and the Netherlands in charge of the 5 linked investigations gathered for the first time to discuss and agree on a coordinated approach to dismantle the OCG. The meeting was attended by twenty-five participants, including Europol officials. As a result of the coordination meeting, Belgium, Bulgaria, and the Netherlands set up a new JIT in Operation Leerdam to define and execute a common case strategy to ensure that the actions in one case would not interfere with the investigations in the other case.

In the framework of an international specialized operation, on 27 September 2016, the leader and two members of the OCG were arrested in Amsterdam. In Bulgaria, six other members of the OCG were arrested pursuant to EAWs and subsequently surrendered to the Belgian and Dutch authorities. One person was arrested in Germany based on a EAW issued by the Netherlands. Ten simultaneous searches were carried out in four different towns in Bulgaria. Evidence and documents related to the OCG were found and seized, as well as cash and drugs. Witnesses were questioned in Belgium, Bulgaria and the Netherlands. During all the investigative actions that took place in Bulgaria, members of the JIT from the Netherlands, including the prosecutor supervising the investigation in Utrecht, were present.

Eurojust supported the activities of the national authorities participating in these two separate JITs, including providing both investigation teams with significant logistical and financial assistance, which in the end amounted to approximately EUR 90 000.

Dimitar Hadzhiyski, Assistant to the National Member for Bulgaria at Eurojust, said: *'For the first time Eurojust facilitated the coordination between two separate JITs. Due to the active involvement of Eurojust, the links between all five national investigations carried out in Bulgaria, the Netherlands and Belgium were established, proper planning of the investigative activities was performed, which resulted in a very successful coordinated operation, dismantling the activities of the OCG. '*

Dietary reference values: advice on riboflavin

EFSA has set dietary reference values for riboflavin (vitamin B2) as part of its review of scientific advice on nutrient intakes.

Based on new scientific findings, the Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition and Allergies (NDA) decided to update the dietary reference values for riboflavin established by the Scientific Committee for Food in 1993. The panel defined daily population reference intakes (PRIs) for riboflavin as follows:

- 0.6 mg for children aged 1-3 years;
- 0.7 mg for children aged 4-6;
- 1.0 mg for children aged 7-10;
- 1.4 mg for children aged 11-14;
- 1.6 mg for adolescents aged 15-17 as well as for adults;
- 1.9 mg for pregnant women;
- 2 mg for lactating women.

For children aged 7-11 months, the panel set an adequate intake (AI) of 0.4 mg per day.

Riboflavin is a water-soluble vitamin that is involved in energy metabolism and the functioning of various enzymes. It is naturally present in many foods of plant or animal origin including milk, milk products, eggs and offal.

EFSA considered comments and input on the draft scientific opinion it received during a five-week public consultation.

[Daily News 04/08/2017](#)

Migration: Commission awards €9.3 million in emergency funding to UNHCR to support refugees in Greece

The European Commission has awarded an additional €9.3 million in emergency assistance to UNCHR to provide targeted support to refugees and migrants in Greece. The grant, which will ensure continuity of services on the islands, covers activities including the provision of transportation, accommodation and auxiliary services to relocation candidates, protection and non-formal education for children (including support to a pilot guardianship network for unaccompanied minors), interpretation, core relief items and support for victims of sexual and gender-based violence and abuse. The overall amount of emergency funding allocated to the Greek authorities and international organisations operating in Greece now stands at €371.16 million, in addition to the €509.5 million allocated to Greece under the national programmes for the period 2014-2020. Overall, the European Union has mobilised over €1.3 billion of support (until 2020) to Greece to help manage migration and the external borders, through various kinds of funding. *(For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Kasia Kolanko – Tel.: +32 229 63444)*

L'UE intensifie son aide humanitaire au Mali et en République Centrafricaine

La Commission européenne a annoncé aujourd'hui l'octroi d'un soutien supplémentaire de 9 millions d'euros en réponse aux crises au Mali et en République Centrafricaine, portant l'assistance humanitaire de l'UE à l'Afrique Occidentale et Centrale à environ 254 millions d'euros depuis le début de l'année. Le commissaire chargé de l'aide humanitaire et de la gestion des crises, Christos **Stylianides** a déclaré à ce sujet: *"Les conflits*

au Mali et en République Centrafricaine continuent de générer beaucoup de souffrance parmi les personnes qui sont contraintes de fuir leur pays. L'UE s'engage à les aider. Aujourd'hui, nous renforçons notre soutien humanitaire pour sauver des vies dans ces deux pays. Cette aide va contribuer à pourvoir des biens de première nécessité tels que de la nourriture et des médicaments aux populations, et soutenir les organisations humanitaires qui travaillent dans les zones touchées par les conflits." Cette enveloppe de 9 millions d'euros comprend deux volets: 5,5 millions d'euros seront attribués aux besoins urgents des populations affectées par la crise en République Centrafricaine; 3,5 millions d'euros vont aider à répondre à la situation préoccupante du Nord et du centre du Mali ainsi que dans les régions voisines du Burkina Faso et de la Mauritanie. L'UE et ses Etats-membres sont les principaux donateurs d'aide humanitaire en Afrique avec 1,5 milliards d'euros pourvus par la Commission ces deux dernières années. Plus de détails sont disponibles [ici](#). (pour plus d'information: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

EU assists Albania in fighting forest fires

The European Commission has helped mobilise two firefighting planes from Greece through the [EU's Civil Protection Mechanism](#), following a request for assistance from Albania to battle forest fires in the country. In addition, the EU's emergency [Copernicus Satellite mapping system](#) has also been activated to help the Albanian civil protection authorities. "The European Union stands in full solidarity with Albania at this time of need. Our thoughts are with all those affected and the local first responders working to tackle the blazes. I thank Greece for this concrete expression of European solidarity. The planes have been operating in the affected areas and will continue to do so today," said Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides**. The Commission's [Emergency Response Coordination Centre](#) is closely monitoring the situation in Albania and the forest fire risk across Europe. [Photos](#) and [video](#) stockshots of the Emergency Centre are available, as well as a [MEMO](#) 'Fighting forest fires in Europe – how it works'. (For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

Commission launched consultation on EU initiative to develop Europe's supercomputers

With the aim of creating a European initiative on [high performance computing](#), the Commission launched yesterday afternoon a consultation calling for opinions on the future development of supercomputing. The results of the consultation will help support the development of the next generation computing and data infrastructure in Europe. High performance computing carries enormous potential for science, society, and investment in the European Union because of its ability to analyse vast quantities of data in real time. It can effectively address societal and scientific challenges in areas such as the development of personalised medicine, decoding the human brain, forecasting climate change and mitigating large-scale industrial and natural disasters. In the 2017 [Mid-Term Review](#) of the Digital Single Market

Strategy and in the 2016 [European Cloud Initiative](#), the Commission announced proposals for a European high performance computing initiative, underlining it as crucial element for the future of European research and industry. Major investments are needed to develop the next generation of supercomputers. It is therefore essential that EU Member States, the public and private sectors join forces through a European initiative. Support for the development of an integrated world-class high performance computing and data infrastructure in Europe was boosted this year by the 'EuroHPC' Declaration signed by nine EU Member States so far: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain. All other Member States are invited to sign the declaration. The consultation runs until 5 September 2017. The results will be used to prepare the European high performance computing initiative. The Commission intends to adopt the initiative in 2018. Everyone interested – academic and researchers, private and public sector representatives and associations – can participate in the consultation [here](#). More information is available [online](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Julia Bräuer – Tel.: +32 229 80707)

Commission launches consultation to help law enforcements to combat crime in the digital age

Today the European Commission is launching a public consultation on improving cross-border access to electronic evidence. Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Vera **Jourová**, already presented three legislative options to improve access to e-evidence at the last Justice Council (8/06). Based on the discussion between Justice Ministers and input of the public, the Commission will prepare a legislative proposal. Commissioner **Jourová** said: *"It is our duty to keep Europeans safe and make sure that criminals are brought to justice. Crime knows no borders, criminal investigations often do. We will change that. The online world cannot serve as safe haven for criminals."* Crime often leaves digital traces that can serve as valuable evidence in criminal proceedings and provide significant leads for investigators. E-evidence could include subscriber information, traffic or metadata as well as content data, for the purpose of criminal investigations. Although the procedures for gathering this type of electronic evidence are usually defined at national level, obtaining electronic evidence frequently has cross-border implications. Present-day solutions often prove unsatisfactory and can even bring investigations to a halt. The consultation is available [here](#) and will be open until 27 October 2017. (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

State aid: Commission concludes Dutch state guarantee to finance shipping companies involves no aid

The European Commission has found that a Dutch state guarantee to support the availability of credit for small and medium-sized ship-owners involves no State aid within the meaning of the EU rules. The State guarantee will be

granted to the NESEC Shipping Debt Fund (“NSDF”), still to be established. NSDF intends to provide senior secured finance for small and medium-sized ship-owners active in the regional shipping sector. Thereby it will address the financing bottleneck that has arisen since the financial crisis. The NSDF intends to lend approximately €250 million to ship-owners, which it plans to raise from institutional investors. The Dutch State will guarantee up to 80% of the funding from these investors for a period of seven years, with a possibility to prolong the guarantee by two additional years. The Commission found guarantee will give the Dutch State an appropriate remuneration in line with market conditions. The Commission therefore concluded that the guarantee does not constitute State aid to the NSDF. More information will be available on the Commission’s [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#), under the case number SA.46664. *(For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: + 32 229 56185; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)*

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control over Hobas Europe by Wietersdorfer and Amiantit

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over Hobas Europe of Austria by Wietersdorfer of Austria and Amiantit of Saudi Arabia. Both Wietersdorfer and Amiantit are active in the manufacture and sale of pipes and pipe systems in Europe and worldwide. Hobas Europe, an existing subsidiary of Wietersdorfer, will operate Wietersdorfer’s and Amiantit’s European businesses in the manufacture and sale of fibre glass reinforced plastic (GRP) pipes and pipe systems. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because the merged entity will continue competing with other GRP pipes manufacturers, as well as manufacturers of pipes of other materials that are used for the same applications. The operation was examined under the normal merger review procedure. More information will be available on the Commission’s [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#) under the case number [M.8356](#). *(For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: + 32 229 56185; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini in Manila for EU-ASEAN Ministerial and ASEAN Regional Forum

From Sunday 6 to Tuesday 8 August, the High Representative/Vice-President, Federica **Mogherini**, will be in the Philippines for a visit focussed on the European Union’s relations with the Association of South East-Asian Nations (ASEAN). The situation in the Korean Peninsula, the South China Sea, counter-terrorism and climate action, and other regional and international issues will be high on the agenda. On Sunday 6 August, the High Representative/Vice-President will co-chair the annual EU-ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference, which this year marks 40 years of partnership between the two blocs. On Monday 7 and Tuesday 8 August, HR/VP **Mogherini** will represent the European Union at the [ASEAN Regional Forum](#), which brings together 27 participants in total, including the ten ASEAN countries, the European Union and countries such as Australia, Canada, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States. While in Manila, High Representative **Mogherini** will

have a number of bilateral meetings, including notably with the Foreign Minister of Australia, Julie Bishop, with whom she will sign the EU-Australia Framework Agreement. Coverage of the visit will be available on [EbS](#). For more information on EU-ASEAN relations, see the [factsheet](#), and for information on the ASEAN Regional Forum, visit the [website](#). (For more information: Catherine Ray – Tel.: + 32 229 69921; Adam Kaznowski – Tel.: +32 229 89359; Lauranne Devillé – Tel.: +32 229 80833)

[Upcoming events](#) of the European Commission (ex-Top News)

Press Release: Pakistan security situation

EASO publishes a Country of Origin Information (COI) report on the security situation in Pakistan.

Today, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published a Country of Origin Information (COI) Report entitled '[Pakistan security situation](#)'. The report is the second update of the security chapter of the EASO COI report on Pakistan, Country Overview, published in August 2015 ¹, first updated in July 2016, and provides information relevant for the protection status determination of Pakistani asylum seekers.

In 2016, Pakistan ranked in the top 5 of countries of origin in the EU+ countries² with a total number of more than 50,000 applicants. By the end of 2016, more than 50,000 cases remained pending. Throughout 2017, the country maintained this ranking in the top countries of origin and the total number of Pakistani applicants has been steadily increasing.

The EASO COI Report 'Pakistan security situation' provides a general description of the security situation in Pakistan, covering the following topics: a brief background on the conflict in the country; actors in the conflict; an overview of recent security trends; the impact of the violence on the civilian population; and the impact of the violence on the state ability to secure law and order. The second part of the report provides a geographical overview of the security situation and a more detailed description of the different regions in Pakistan. In each regional chapter, a short description of the region is given, followed by a description of the security trends, the actors in the region and the impact of the violence on the population.

The main findings of the report include the continuation of airstrikes and ground operations by the Pakistani military forces against militant groups in different provinces in 2016. The military operation in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and FATA, Zarb-e-Azb, which started in 2014, ended early 2017. A new operation,

called Radd-Ul-Fasaad, was launched in different regions of the country. At the same time, militant or terrorist attacks continued to occur, as well as targeted killings. The situation at Pakistan's borders with India and Afghanistan was tense. Overall, sources report a decrease in total numbers of violent incidents and casualties throughout 2016 and 2017.

The report was drafted by the Belgian Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (Cedoca, Centre for Documentation and Research) in accordance with the [EASO COI Report Methodology](#). It was also reviewed by experts from the Norwegian COI unit Landinfo, the Asylum Research Consultancy (ARC) and EASO, in order to ensure the highest quality.

It is EASO's intention to continue to produce such reports on important countries of origin and to update them on a regular basis in order to raise and harmonise COI standards in the EU and to further support the practical implementation of the Common European Asylum System.

The Report can be downloaded [here](#).
Download Press Release [here](#).

Any further information may be obtained from the European Asylum Support Office by contacting Mr Jean-Pierre Schembri on the following e-mail address: jean-pierre.schembri@easo.europa.eu

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1. All reports are available via EASO's website: (<http://easo.europa.eu/asylum-documentation/easo-publication-and-documentation/>).
 2. EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland.

[Labour mobility in Europe during the Great Recession](#)

This blog piece was originally posted on [Social Europe](#). Its authors are Martina Bisello and Enrique Fernández-Macías, both researchers at Eurofound, and Vincenzo Maccarrone, University College Dublin.

The Great Recession had lasting effects on European labour markets, both in terms of employment levels and structure. Not only did employment rates drop significantly – taking years to return to pre-crisis levels, with some countries not fully recovered yet – but the crisis also accelerated structural change and generalised a pattern of job polarisation across Europe. In other words, we witnessed a relative decline in mid-paid jobs compared to those at the top and bottom of the occupational structure.

But what happened to workers who lost their jobs during the recession, beyond the headline unemployment statistics? Did they remain unemployed or were they able to find other jobs? And what kind of jobs? Were the opportunities for

upward occupational mobility affected by the crisis?

The crisis not only changed employment levels and structure, but also the flows and transitions between jobs and different employment statuses. In a recently published Eurofound report, we investigate patterns of employment mobility and occupational flows associated with broad labour market developments during the crisis in countries with different economic and social structures. The main findings show that even countries with very different social systems can have a similar degree of occupational mobility in their economies. We evaluated the nature of these flows from an occupational perspective, taking into account the quality of the jobs from and into which labour is flowing, by differentiating them into wage quintiles.

The analysis was carried out by comparing labour market transitions from 2006 to 2013 in six European countries (France, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK), among which a significant degree of cross-country variation in mobility patterns was expected, both because of a different institutional setting and a heterogeneous impact of the crisis in terms of duration and intensity. Three separate time periods were analysed: just before the crisis (2006–2007), immediately after (2009–2010), and a few years into it (2012–2013), when some countries started to recover and others remained in recession.

The results distinguished three pairs of countries on the basis of the degree of occupational mobility in their labour markets:

- Sweden and the UK, with a high level of occupational mobility and frequent flows from unemployment into low-paid employment (but not vice versa);
- France and Italy, with comparatively less mobile labour markets and limited flows between jobs or employment status;
- Poland and Spain, where the mobility patterns suggest a dual labour market in which job opportunities for the unemployed are particularly skewed towards low-paid jobs, and workers in low-paid jobs face a particularly high risk of unemployment.

The fact that Poland and Spain, the two countries with the largest shares of temporary employment in Europe, generated by similar labour market reforms (although 20 years apart), and France and Italy, characterised by comparatively less dynamic labour markets, are paired together is not particularly surprising. But the pairing of Sweden and the UK is somewhat unexpected; these countries had similar employment and occupational flows despite their very different socio-economic models, which are often described as being at opposite extremes of European classifications (for instance, Sweden and the UK have the lowest and highest levels of wage inequality in the EU, respectively).

Furthermore, occupational mobility in Sweden and the UK remained high during the crisis, although this partly reflects better general economic conditions (both are non-euro countries whose employment levels recovered faster though the UK saw a fall in real wages). In both countries, there was a high level

of mobility not only between employment and unemployment but also between different categories of jobs and pay levels. And although the transition from unemployment into employment is more often into low-paid jobs rather than high-paid jobs, the fact that there are no equivalently high flows from low-paid jobs into unemployment suggests that low-paid jobs in Sweden and the UK do offer chances of later advancement

Table 1: Mobility tables – Sweden

Table 2: Mobility tables – UK

Notes: The values shown in the cells reflect percentage of people coming that was in a particular status 1 year ago and in a particular status in the current year. The status possible status are : Q1 = Quintile 1, Q2 = Quintile 2, etc.; U = unemployment ; I = Inactivity

Source: EU-SILC (authors' calculations). Mobility tables for other countries and further breakdowns available in the report.

Yet notwithstanding these remarkable similarities, a closer look at mobility flows taking into account relevant individual characteristics, such as being a woman, reveals substantial differences which one would expect when comparing Sweden and the UK. Indeed, being a woman in the UK increases the risk of losing one's job relative to men, while in Sweden the effect is exactly the opposite or otherwise insignificant. Similarly, the negative effect of the arrival of a new child in the household on women's employment is clear in the UK but negligible in Sweden, where the social system is very supportive of maternal employment. This suggests that a high level of mobility can be the result of (or, at least, can coexist with) very different socio-economic models.

While a certain degree of occupational mobility as in Sweden and the UK is probably desirable, to the extent that it is not limited to the lower occupational levels but allows the possibility of upgrading to better jobs, a proper evaluation of the actual implications of each type of transition for the individuals affected would be needed to draw sound policy implications. This would require expanding the analysis to the actual wage and income levels involved, as well as the generosity of unemployment benefits and other attributes of the social system. However, these results show that there is no single track to higher occupational mobility.

Overall, our results show very different patterns and levels of mobility in the six European countries studied. While through the recession high-mobility countries like Sweden and the UK maintained a very dynamic labour market, the crisis hit particularly hard in Spain and its effect on unemployment risks expanded into the middle quintiles (with only the top quintile remaining more or less protected). A better understanding of the flows that lurk behind aggregate numbers, that are continuously taking place into and out of employment and from job to job, is necessary to understand the impact that the recent crisis had on life chances among individuals.