

Apostolos Tzitzikostas, President of the European Committee of the Regions, receives the International Medal of the Community of Madrid



President of the Community of Madrid, Isabel Diaz Ayuso, presented the award in recognition of the support given to the region

The President of the European Committee of the Regions, Apostolos Tzitzikostas, has received the International Medal of the Community of Madrid in recognition of his “unconditional support” to the region, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the ceremony held in the Royal House of the Post Office of Madrid, seat of the regional government, President [Apostolos Tzitzikostas](#), said: “It is a great honour to receive the International Medal of the Community of Madrid. Madrid will always be on my mind and in my heart. I dedicate this medal to the 1 million local leaders in the 300 regions and 90,000 municipalities across Europe who have been fighting on the frontline against the pandemic.”

[Isabel Díaz Ayuso](#), President of the Community of Madrid, thanked the President for his “unconditional support” to the region and stated: “The

intention of the Community of Madrid is to participate in the great project of free and equal citizens that is Europe, committed to life and freedom. These values are sometimes questioned and must be defended by all institutions, from the most local, regional and national, to the European ones”.

The International Medal of the Community of Madrid was created by the regional government of Madrid in 2017 to award representatives of other countries or international organisations in recognition of their institutional work.

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Invitation letter by President Charles Michel to the members of the European Council ahead of their meeting of 24 and 25 June 2021



It is my pleasure to invite you to our European Council meeting on 24 and 25 June, which will start with an exchange of views with UN Secretary-General António Guterres on global challenges and geopolitical issues.

Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, both in the EU and worldwide, will be a key topic. The successful vaccination campaign that is well underway across the EU, together with the launch of the Digital COVID Certificate, will facilitate free movement over the summer months and beyond. However, we need to keep a close eye on variants and contain their spread in a coordinated manner. As agreed in February, we will also engage in a first exchange on lessons learned from the pandemic so far, so as to best prepare for future crises. We will discuss how the EU can continue to lead efforts to vaccinate the world through exports and donations and how to increase the worldwide supply of vaccines.

On migration, we will take stock of the situation on the various routes. Our aim continues to be to prevent loss of life and to reduce pressure on the EU's borders. We will therefore focus on the external dimension, with the aim of strengthening our cooperation with countries of origin and transit. We

should mandate action that will deliver results rapidly.

As regards international issues, we will return to the EU's relations with Turkey, as announced in March. We will discuss relations with Russia, following our in-depth debate in May and the Commission and High Representative's report. We will review the implementation of our recent decisions on Belarus. I expect us also to adopt conclusions on Libya, the Sahel and Ethiopia.

Turning to the economic recovery, we will take stock of the implementation of Next Generation EU. Once approved, national Recovery and Resilience Plans will enable a full and inclusive economic recovery. They will also pave the way for the Union's green and digital transitions, the twin engines of Europe's growth in the decades to come.

At the end of our meeting on Friday, we will be joined by the Presidents of the European Central Bank and the Eurogroup for a Euro Summit in inclusive format. We will have a forward-looking discussion on how to foster a strong and sustainable economic recovery. This entails addressing the way forward on the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union as well as policy coordination in the euro area.

As to the practical proceedings, we will start at 1:00 pm on Thursday with our working lunch with UN Secretary-General António Guterres. We will then hold our traditional exchange of views with President Sassoli. After a report by Prime Minister Costa on the work in the Council, we will address COVID-19, then migration in our first working session. Our working dinner will mainly focus on external relations. We will resume on Friday morning with a working session on the economic recovery, before turning to the Euro Summit in inclusive format.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

[Fake perfumes assembly site dismantled in Italy](#)



Criminal network was importing counterfeit goods from EU-neighbouring countries for distribution on the Italian and EU markets

The Italian Carabinieri Corps (NAS Carabinieri), supported by Europol, dismantled an organised crime group involved in the trafficking of counterfeit goods including counterfeit perfumes produced in EU-neighbouring countries.

The action day on 18 June 2021 led to:

- 15 individuals reported to the judicial authority;
- The dismantling of a site used for the clandestine packaging of cosmetics; and
- Seizures including 2 000 counterfeit items (perfumes, clothing, leather accessories, watches and IT accessories), famous brand labels, about 2 000 perfumes still to be assembled and cash.

The investigation disrupted a consolidated system aimed at trafficking perfumes and counterfeit goods. The criminal network was operating throughout the Italian territory while maintaining close commercial links to producers in EU-neighbouring countries. The goods were transported through the Balkan route and distributed on the Italian market. The criminal network was importing perfumes in bulk filled in tanks, which were then packed in an illegal assembly site. Presumably, the products were packed quickly before being delivered to the buyers, minimising the risk of detection by avoiding stocking in big quantities. The work performed by the underground assembly point was very difficult to detect since the individuals involved created a sophisticated supply chain showing the complete counterfeit product to the buyers only hours before they were delivered.

Europol supported the investigation with operational analysis, facilitated the information exchange and liaised with representatives from the private sector. During the action day, Europol deployed an expert on the field to provide real-time analytical support to investigators. This action day was a spin-off operation from Europol's coordinated Operation Shield.

Europol's Property Crime Coordinated Coalition (IPC3) is co-funded by EUIPO (European Union Intellectual Property Office) to combat intellectual property crime.

Six arrested for siphoning €12 million in fraudulent COVID-19 unemployment payments from France

Close to €2 million worth in cash was seized and over €6 million on bank accounts recovered as result of this coordinated action

On 16 June, officers from the **French National Gendarmerie** (Gendarmerie Nationale) and the **Israeli Police** (מחלקת משטרה ישראלית) closed in on the members of an organised crime group running a sophisticated benefit fraud scheme on either side the Mediterranean Sea. A total of six individuals were arrested in various locations across France.

This criminal syndicate is believed to have swindled the French State out of €12 million in COVID-19 unemployment benefits by using 3 600 shell companies to claim the payments. The fraudulently obtained benefits were paid onto French bank accounts, before being immediately transferred abroad and moved across Europe before being exchanged into virtual currencies.

The main suspect – a 30-year-old Franco-Israeli citizen – and his wife were arrested in Replonges (France) close to the Swiss border on 16 June at 05:00 am while trying to flee to Geneva where they were planning to take a flight to Tel-Aviv booked at the last minute.

An hour later, officers from the Gendarmerie's Central Office for Combatting Illegal Labour (OCLTI) and Research Section of Toulouse (SR Toulouse) raided several addresses across Paris (19th arrondissement) and its suburbs (Pantin) to arrest their accomplices – all family relatives, and carry out searches to locate, among other things, the place where a large sum of money was believed to be hidden.

The cash was found on that same evening in a private parking lot in the 19th arrondissement of Paris). A total of €1 765 630 and US\$ 3 420 in cash was discovered hidden in fireproof and waterproof bags. A pouch containing three luxury watches worth €230 000 and jewellery worth €30 000 was also found at the same location.

Besides these seizures, the French authorities also recovered over €6,2 million on bank accounts owned by this criminal group.

In parallel to the actions in France, the Israeli Police took action against the members of this same criminal group located in Israel. An accomplice was detained, and a call centre believed to have been used to organise these large – scale scams was searched in the city of Netanya. Phones and high-tech IT devices were seized on this occasion.

Europol's support

Europol's support was instrumental in the success of this case:

- **Europol's European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC)** performed a financial analysis detailing the scheme used by these criminals to launder their proceeds of crime;
- **Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3)** performed a crypto asset tracing analysis;
- Two operational meetings were organised by Europol to bring together the national investigators to prepare for the action day. Since then, Europol has provided continuous intelligence development to support the field investigators;
- A Europol specialist was deployed to Paris to support the French authorities with the action day.

This operation 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. Criminal finances is one of the priorities for the Policy Cycle.

Twelfth meeting of the Accession Conference with Serbia at Ministerial level



The twelfth meeting of the Accession Conference with Serbia at Ministerial level was held today in Luxembourg. The meeting marks a milestone in the evolution of the accession negotiations, since it is the first to have taken place since the Council approved the revised enlargement methodology, which now also applies to the accession process of Serbia.

The European Union delegation was led by Ms Ana Paula Zacarias, Secretary of State for European Affairs, on behalf of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Serbian delegation was led by Prime Minister Ana Brnabić.

The revised enlargement methodology aims to reinvigorate the accession process. It includes: a stronger focus on fundamental reforms; a stronger political steer; increased dynamism; and a more predictable process, based on objective criteria and rigorous positive and negative conditionality.

Providing the accession process with a stronger political steer from the Intergovernmental Conferences is one of the key elements of the revised enlargement methodology. The meeting therefore served to strengthen the dialogue between the Member States and Serbia, with the aim of focusing efforts on key reforms that should allow for progress in the accession process.

The EU welcomed Serbia's ambition to open clusters 3 and 4 once all the conditions are met, and the efforts that Serbia has made in recent months in this regard. The advancement of the negotiations will continue to be guided by Serbia's progress in preparing for accession, as established in the Negotiation Framework.

[Visit the meeting page](#)