

New major interventions to block encrypted communications of criminal networks



Judicial and law enforcement authorities in Belgium, France and the Netherlands have in close cooperation enabled major interventions to block the further use of encrypted communications by large-scale organised crime groups (OCGs), with the support of Europol and Eurojust. The continuous monitoring of the illegal Sky ECC communication service tool by investigators in the three countries involved has provided invaluable insights into hundreds of millions of messages exchanged between criminals. This has resulted in the collection of crucial information on over a hundred of planned large-scale criminal operations, preventing potential life threatening situations and possible victims.

During an action day on 9 March 2021, a large number of arrests were made, as well as numerous house searches and seizures in Belgium and the Netherlands.

The operation is an essential part of the continuous effort of judiciary and law enforcement in the EU and third countries to disrupt the illegal use of encrypted communications, as was already displayed last year following the successful de-encryption of the EncroChat communication platform.

As of mid-February, authorities have been able to monitor the information flow of approximately 70 000 users of Sky ECC. Many users of EncroChat changed over to the popular Sky ECC platform, after EncroChat was unveiled in 2020.

By successfully unlocking the encryption of Sky ECC, the information acquired will provide insights into criminal activities in various EU Member States and beyond and will assist in expanding investigations and solving serious and cross-border organised crime for the coming months, possibly years.

Law enforcement in all three countries has been on a continuous stand by during the last month to be able to provide rapid reactions to possible dangerous criminal activities when required. The newly acquired information

will now be analysed further

Investigations into the tool started in Belgium, after mobile phones seized during searches showed the use of Sky ECC by suspects. Worldwide, approximately 170 000 individuals use the tool, which has its own infrastructure and applications and is operated from the United States and Canada, using computer servers based in Europe. On a global scale, around three million messages are being exchanged each day via Sky ECC. Over 20 percent of the users are based in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Europol has and will continue to provide the authorities of Belgium, Netherlands and other affected countries with tactical, technical and financial support and will be dealing with this important flow of information on criminal activities in order to prevent threats to life and major crimes.

[Eurojust](#) has provided advice and support regarding cross-border judicial cooperation and organised 12 coordination meetings to enable this collaboration. The Agency will continue to provide this support and stands ready for further advice and cross-border operational financial support to all Member States and countries involved, to ensure an adequate cross-border judicial cooperation.

The following authorities participated in the operation:

- **Belgium:** Federal Prosecutor's Office, Public Prosecutor's Office Antwerpen, Investigative Judge Office Mechelen, Federal Judicial Police, Federal Police and DSU Unit
- **France:** National Jurisdiction against Organised Crime (JUNALCO), Central Directorate of the Judicial Police (DCPJ)
- **The Netherlands:** National Public Prosecution Service, Public Prosecutor's Office Amsterdam, National Police

[Article – Building tomorrow's Europe: EU paves way for Conference on the Future of Europe](#)



Parliament President David Sassoli; Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa, on behalf of the Council of the EU; and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen signed the declaration in a ceremony on 10 March in Parliament's Brussels plenary chamber.

The Conference on the Future of Europe aims to give people a greater role in shaping the EU's future policies and ambitions. People can take part in many events and debates across the EU, as well as have a say through a multilingual digital platform.

"The expectations of EU citizens are stronger than ever," said Sassoli. "It is essential to continue to give Europe the right tools to respond to these expectations, these demands for solidarity. This is an opportunity to rediscover the soul of the European project. We invite all European citizens to get involved in the conference and to build the Europe of tomorrow, so that it can become 'their Europe'."

"We are aware that we don't all have the same vision for the future of Europe," said Costa. "That's exactly why the Conference on the Future of Europe will be a decisive point in time so that we can discuss this without any taboos, bringing together our different visions. Only in this way we can overcome differences and strengthen what brings us together."

"It is exactly in times of crisis that we see where Europe works for people, and where we have to get better," said von der Leyen. "This conference has to go beyond Brussels, beyond national capitals. We want to hear from European citizens in their full diversity – from young and old, city dwellers and rural residents, from Erasmus students to those who took to the streets to demonstrate as well as from those who have their doubts if creating an ever closer union is the right road to take."

A [survey](#), carried out at the end of 2020, shows three quarters of Europeans think the conference would have a positive impact on democracy in the EU. Half of the respondents say they want to get involved themselves.

[Press release – Future of Europe: Engaging with citizens to build a more resilient Europe](#)



This paves the way to launching a series of debates and discussions that will enable people from every corner of Europe to share their ideas to help shape Europe's future.

President Sassoli said: "Today marks a new start for the European Union and for all European citizens. The Conference on the future of Europe will be a unique opportunity for all European citizens and our civil society to shape Europe's future, a common project for a functioning European democracy. We call on all of you to come forward to participate with your voice to building what will be tomorrow's Europe, what will be YOUR Europe."

Prime Minister Costa said: "The convening of the Conference on the Future of Europe is a message of confidence and hope for the future that we send to

Europeans. Confidence that we will overcome the pandemic and the crisis; hope that together we will build a fair, green and digital future Europe.”

President von der Leyen said: “Today we are inviting all Europeans to speak up. To say what Europe they want to live in, to shape it and join forces to help us build it. Citizens’ expectations are clear: they want to have their say on the future of Europe, on matters which affect their lives. Our promise today is equally clear: we will listen. And then, we will act.”

See the live replays of the speeches in plenary [here](#).

The Conference sets itself the goal of giving citizens a greater role in shaping EU policies and ambitions, improving the Union’s resilience to crises, be it economic or health-related. It will create a new public forum for an open, inclusive, transparent and structured debate with Europeans around the issues that matter to them and affect their everyday lives.

The Joint Declaration gives a non-exhaustive list of possible themes for the Conference. It mentions health, climate change, social fairness, digital transformation, the EU’s role in the world, and how to strengthen democratic processes governing the EU. These topics concur with overarching EU priorities and the issues raised by citizens in opinion polls. Ultimately, participating citizens will decide what topics the Conference will discuss.

Next steps

The Conference is under the authority of the three institutions leading this endeavour, represented by their Presidents, acting as its Joint Presidency. An Executive Board, equally representing the three institutions will soon be constituted, with national Parliaments having observer status. The Executive Board will oversee the works of the Conference, and prepare the Conference Plenary meetings, including citizens’ input and their follow up.

Background

The Joint Declaration sets out the scope, structure, objectives and principles of the Conference. It sets the scene for citizen-led events, to be co-organised with civil society and stakeholders at all levels, national and regional parliaments, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee, social partners and academia. Their participation in the process is essential, to ensure the broadest outreach and engagement.

The Conference will use various fora, including digital, and where possible, also physical formats, respecting COVID-19 rules. An interactive multilingual digital platform will allow citizens and stakeholders to submit ideas online, and help them participate in or organise events.

The platform, and all events organised under the auspices of the Conference, are to be based on principles of inclusiveness, openness and transparency, with respect for privacy and EU data protection rules. European Citizens’ panels organised at European level are to be broadcast, and all online submissions are to be made public.

The Conference is invited to reach conclusions to provide guidance for Europe's future direction.

[EUIPO-NIPO online Heads meeting](#)

March 10, 2021 [EU Intellectual Property Network](#)

EUIPO-NIPO online Heads meeting



On 10 March 2021, the Executive Director held an online Heads meeting with the new Director General of the [Norwegian Industrial Property Office \(NIPO\)](#), Ms Kathrine Myhre.

The purpose of the meeting was to review the progress in our cooperation activities, and to agree on other future initiatives to be implemented jointly, within the framework of the 'Broaden the Cooperation Framework outside the EU' project launched in January 2021 under SP2025, with a focus on the extension of IP tools and practices.

NIPO has always been a close partner of the EUIPO. Examples of our cooperation are the integration of the Harmonised Database of Goods and Services (HDB), a valuable list of terms for our users available in [TMclass](#) since 20 January 2021, and their support in organising two IPforYOU seminars that took place on 20 and 21 January 2021. These were addressed to Norwegian SMEs and IP professionals.

The meeting anticipates a continued excellent collaboration between both Offices. Future joint initiatives will be held in the context of our Memorandum of Understanding, promoting a dynamic environment for the growth of business and entrepreneurship.

This international cooperation activity falls under Strategic Driver 1 – Interconnected, efficient and reliable IP system. It contributes to Strategic Goal 1.1 – Matching tools and practices with users’ needs, with Key Initiative 3 – Enhanced engagement with global partners for the extension of common tools and practices.

Media advisory – Informal video conference of ministers of home affairs, 12 March 2021



Indicative programme

Chair: Eduardo Cabrita, Minister of Internal Administration

+/-9.30 – Doorstep by Minister Cabrita

10.00 – Video conference of ministers of home affairs

Directive on the resilience of critical entities ([public session](#))

Any other business: current legislative proposals ([public session](#))

Asylum and Migration: Pact on Migration and Asylum ([public session](#))

Asylum and Migration: enhancing cooperation on return and readmission

Any other business

– Schengen evaluation of Croatia

– COVID 19/borders

Enhancing EU-North Africa Countries cooperation

Any other business

– Actions against judges and prosecutors: recent developments

+/- 16.30 – press conference in [live streaming](#)

Arrangements for the press conference

Please note that there will be no physical press conference. EU accredited journalists will be able to ask questions remotely provided they have registered in advance.

You can register and have the possibility to ask questions remotely through [this link](#). Journalists who already registered for previous home affairs videoconferences do not need to register again.

Journalists who already registered for previous home affairs video conferences do not need to register again.

Deadline for registration: Friday, 12 March at 15:30.

Further instructions will be sent to all registered participants approximately half an hour after the deadline.

[Visit the meeting page](#)