

European Commission appoints new Head of regional office in Milan

Mr Gaudina, an Italian national, will take up office on 1 September 2017. He brings over 30 years of experience, of which over 20 years of institutional communications in the EU context. In his role, Mr Gaudina will represent the European Commission and will encourage the debate on EU issues, mainly in Northern Italy.

For the past eight years, Mr Gaudina has been Head of the Communication Unit at the European Research Council (ERC) in Brussels. In this role, he planned and coordinated the ERC communication strategy, including the promotion of ERC calls and success stories. Between 2007 and 2009, he worked in the Commission's Communication department. There, he was in charge of partnerships with Member States for communication actions, of the European Public Spaces – public areas in the European Commission buildings across in Member States where citizens can learn about the EU – and of the actions for youth and schools. Between 2004 and 2007, Mr Gaudina worked in the European Commission Representation in Rome, Italy. In his role, he organised the 50th Anniversary of the Rome Treaties' celebrations and launched the European Public Space at the premises of the Representation in Rome.

Mr Gaudina started working for the European Commission in 1994 as a communication officer. Before joining the Commission, he was a journalist in Italy.

Mr Gaudina holds a degree in Political Science from the University of Turin, Italy. In addition to his native Italian, Mr Gaudina is fluent in English, French, Spanish and has a basic knowledge of Swedish.

Background

The Commission has Representations in all 28 Member States as well as Regional Offices in Barcelona, Belfast, Bonn, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Marseille, Milan, Munich and Wroclaw. The Representations are the Commission's eyes, ears and voice on the ground in all EU Member States. They interact with national authorities and stakeholders and inform the media and the public about EU policies. The Representations report to the Commission's headquarters on significant developments in the Member States. Since the beginning of the Juncker Commission, Heads of Representations are appointed by the President and are his political representatives in the Member State to which they are posted.

For More Information

http://ec.europa.eu/italy/index_it.htm

Network of payment card fraudsters dismantled

13 June 2017

A successful operation that took down an international criminal network of payment card fraudsters was carried out by Central Investigating Judge number 5, the Public Prosecution Office at the Audiencia Nacional and National Police of Spain and the Specialised Public Prosecutors' Office of Bulgaria, together with the General Directorate Combating Organized Crime in Bulgaria, with the support of Eurojust and Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3).

As a result of the cross-border action, 31 suspects were arrested (21 in Spain, 9 in Bulgaria and one in Czech Republic) and 48 house searches (14 in Spain and 34 in Bulgaria) were carried out. The suspects were in possession of equipment used to forge payment cards, payment card data readers-recorders, skimmers, micro cameras, devices to manipulate ATMs, as well as cash and numerous counterfeit cards, drugs and forged euro banknotes.

Between 2014 and 2017, the criminal network installed skimming devices on an average of 400 ATMs every year, to copy and clone the data contained on the bank cards. The forged cards were then used to make illegal transactions in 200 ATMs outside the European Union, mainly in the USA, the Dominican Republic, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Peru, the Philippines and Costa Rica. Approximately 3 000 EU citizens were affected by the criminal network, with losses of at least EUR 500 000.

During the investigation, Eurojust ensured close contacts and coordination among the prosecuting and investigating authorities in Spain and Bulgaria. Europol supported the case by providing tailored intelligence analysis and expertise to the investigators and deploying mobile offices on the spot to Spain and Bulgaria. Several coordination and operational meetings took place prior to the action at Eurojust and Europol. Due to the demanding investigative measures run on an international level, a joint investigation team (JIT) was set up between the cooperating countries with the assistance of Eurojust and Europol.

Francisco Jiménez-Villarejo, National Member for Spain at Eurojust, said: *'This successful operation confirms Eurojust's commitment to protect the assets of EU citizens from falling into the hands of cyber fraudsters. An entire criminal network was taken down and, as a result, is no longer able to defraud innocent victims, thanks to the joint efforts of the Spanish and Bulgarian prosecuting authorities, and the valuable support provided by their National Desks at Eurojust.'*

Kamen Mihov, National Member for Bulgaria at Eurojust, said: *'The joint operation was very successful. The level of coordination in the context of*

the JIT was swift, very professional and result-oriented. We highly appreciate the high level of expertise of our colleagues in the Specialised Prosecutors' Office of Bulgaria as well as the best practice used in dismantling of this complex OCG.'

Steven Wilson, head of EC3 at Europol, said: *'Police forces in the EU are utilising Europol's unique tools to ensure that electronic payment transactions are made safer. We are continuously investing more resources into this vital support platform, and now we are seeing the results of this essential work.'*

[Pressemitteilung: Mit dem Treuhandfonds für die Zentralafrikanische Republik wurden "positive Ergebnisse" erzielt, so die EU-Prüfer](#)

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[Loss of biodiversity endangers our livelihood](#)

EESC sounds the alarm and blames Commission and Member States for lack of political will.

The EESC sounds the alarm amid a summer of heavy storms, landslides and other freak weather events. Several EESC proposals for the better protection of nature have been met with no reaction from the Commission or the Member States so far. *"We again call on the Commission and Member States to ensure a swift and consistent implementation of the biodiversity strategy, particularly of the Birds and Habitat Directive and the Water Directive as important means of protecting biodiversity"*, says German EESC member Lutz Ribbe, referring to his [opinion on EU biodiversity policy](#).

Natura 2000 – 20 years overdue: EESC calls for dedicated budget

The Natura 2000 network is mainly based on the Habitat Directive with special protection areas for birds under the Birds Directive. Its purpose is to preserve rare flora and fauna and unique biotopes in designated areas. This network should have been completed back in 1995. Now in 2017, nearly all Natura 2000 sites have finally been designated – comprising around 18% of the EU's land area – but many of the sites still do not enjoy permanent legal protection and only around half of them have management plans. *“This is evidence of incapacity or just ignorance on the part of the EU and many of its Member States. We understand that the EU is facing many challenges, such as Brexit, unemployment, and terrorism, which we as representatives of civil society are working on side by side with the Commission. **But we must not forget that biodiversity is our livelihood and continued plundering of our nature robs us of this livelihood**”,* warns Mr Ribbe. The EESC believes that one of the main reasons for lagging behind in meeting the original goals lies in the funding for Natura 2000 areas, which almost exclusively comes from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). *“In these two funds, Natura 2000 clashes with many other projects, leaving nature protection in many cases the loser. We have always warned against this conflict of interest and call again on the Commission to swiftly approve an extra Natura 2000 budget with a precise cost calculation as the starting point”,* outlines Mr Ribbe. Experts estimate that around € 10 billion is needed per year, particularly in order to compensate landowners for their losses or to pay for special services. *“Nature protection is a public good and must not be carried out at the expense of the land owners”,* states the EESC.

Biodiversity is a cross-cutting issue: The CAP reform must take it into consideration

Pollinators, decomposers and many other species cannot be protected by focusing solely on the designation of protected areas. Biodiversity needs to be included in other policies too, particularly in the agricultural sector. It is principally this sector – as indeed the Commission and Council rightly emphasise – that causes the highest degrees of pressure on terrestrial ecosystems. *“We therefore do hope that the mid-term review of the ‘ecological focus areas’ and the upcoming reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) will also focus on the achievement of the biodiversity objectives”,* says Mr Ribbe.

Inconsistencies in EU policies are not limited solely to agriculture policy; a lack of implementation and concerted action can be pinpointed in other policy areas as well. In the EESC's view, biodiversity is comparable to climate protection, which should be addressed across all policies. It is not just about conserving animal or plant species: **it concerns the very conditions of human existence and therefore ought to be a cross-cutting issue.**

As regards the protection of biodiversity, the EESC stresses that there is no shortage of laws, regulations, political declarations and recommendations in the EU. *“The problem is the lack of implementation. This whole judicial framework is not worth the paper on which it is written as long as it is not transformed into real action,”* concludes Mr Ribbe. *“The Commission has the*

tools and means, not least in the European Semester, to encourage the Member States to stick to their obligations. For us, this failure is a sign of the Commission's and Member States' lack of political willingness and cooperation."

Boštjan Škrlec: New National Member for Slovenia at Eurojust

The Hague, 29 August 2017

✘ Boštjan Škrlec began his career as a State Prosecutor in 1999. He has more than 20 years of experience in the judiciary. Being recognised as a prosecutor with considerable professional expertise by the Prosecutorial Council, he was seconded to the Office of the Prosecutor General in 2005 and to the Ministry of Justice in 2007.

Throughout his professional career, Mr Škrlec has been involved in international relations and cooperation. He has participated in numerous international projects and has worked with international institutions in the field of criminal justice. He has been a member of the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures (MONEYVAL) at the Council of Europe since 2005, and is currently participating in the work of its European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). Since 2011, he is a contact point for Slovenia in the [Genocide Network](#).

Mr Škrlec is a regular speaker at the Centre for Judicial Training at the Ministry of Justice and has participated as a speaker in several meetings and seminars organised by Eurojust. Currently, he is actively participating in the [Twinning project](#) between the Republic of Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina on strengthening the law enforcement agencies in that country.

In 2007, during the Slovenian EU Presidency, he chaired the working group negotiating the Council Decision on the strengthening of Eurojust and obtained in-depth knowledge about Eurojust as an EU body. From 2008 to 2012, Mr Škrlec served as the State Secretary at the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Slovenia. He actively participated in preparation and adoption of legislation introducing important reforms, such as plea bargaining in criminal procedure and the establishment of the Specialised Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Slovenia.

Before joining Eurojust, Mr Škrlec was the Director General at the Office of the State Prosecutor General of the Republic of Slovenia.

Upon his appointment, Mr Škrlec said, *'It is with a strong sense of responsibility that I am taking over the tasks of the National Member of*

Slovenia. Increasing terrorist threats, growing cybercrime and human trafficking are presenting major challenges to investigation and prosecution of criminal offences. My intention is therefore to invest my knowledge, experience and energy into improvement of cooperation between Slovenian prosecution authorities and authorities of other Member States to enhance their efficiency when prosecuting the most dangerous types of cross-border crime. With energy, dedication and commitment, I will, together with my colleagues at the Slovenian Desk at Eurojust, aim to sustain and improve the existing high-quality standards, which are enabling Eurojust to achieve its success at establishing the European Union as an area of freedom, security and justice.'

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