

Fraud network taken down

Eurojust joint investigation team dismantles organised crime group that caused damages of more than €600 000

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An organised crime group (OCG) involved in cross-border fraud, cybercrime and money laundering was taken down in Romania and Bulgaria with the support of Eurojust, the EU's Judicial Cooperation Unit. A joint investigation team (JIT) between the Romanian and German judicial and law enforcement authorities was set up at Eurojust in June 2018. The JIT, which was logistically and operationally supported by Eurojust, was instrumental in the success of the investigation that led to the identification of 24 suspects. The authorities identified at least 125 victims, all German citizens, who were defrauded of an amount exceeding €600 000. Without Eurojust's assistance, the simultaneous operations would not have delivered the expected results.

On 9 April, the Directorate for Investigation of Organized Crime and Terrorism, Vâlcea Territorial Office, Romania, and the Detmold Public Prosecutor's Office in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, conducted the second stage of the joint investigations, with the support of the Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC) and Bulgarian national authorities. Fifteen simultaneous house searches were performed in Bucharest, other Romanian cities and Bulgaria. Numerous computers, telephones and other evidence were seized, and significant amounts of money, cars and other assets were identified. Twelve suspects were heard, three of whom were formally accused and subject to preventive measures.

The OCG, which was composed of Romanian nationals, allegedly initiated its criminal activities in spring 2018 in Vâlcea County. For more than one year, the OCG was selling cars via the Internet to victims in all German-speaking countries. By faking the websites of well-known companies, members of the OCG received payments in accounts opened outside Romania, using false documentation, and never delivered the cars to the victims. To obtain the criminal proceeds, the OCG members converted the amounts received online into cryptocurrency.