

International operations against illegal immigrant smuggling ring

Eurojust/Europol joint press release

26 October 2017

Judicial and law enforcement authorities from Belgium, Bulgaria, France, the Netherlands and the UK, supported by Eurojust and Europol, took action early today against a Europe-wide organised criminal group (OCG).

The OCG is suspected of facilitating unlawful immigration from countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan and Vietnam into the European Union in breach of immigration law. The OCG is also suspected of money laundering. The OCG is believed to have transported migrants in specially adapted vehicles, passing through Bulgaria, Belgium, France and the Netherlands, with the final destination being the UK.

Investigations into the OCG began in 2016 in the UK and the Netherlands, and links were detected to the other three Member States. UK and Dutch authorities brought the investigation to the attention of the affected Member States at a meeting of the [North Sea Task Force](#), the establishment of which had been agreed at Eurojust with the objective of enhancing cooperation in tackling illegal immigrant smuggling in the UK, Belgium, France and the Netherlands.

Eurojust opened a case in January 2017. At the first of two coordination meetings organised by and held at Eurojust, national authorities from the UK, Belgium, Bulgaria, France and the Netherlands took the decision to form a joint investigation team (JIT). All five Member States, plus Eurojust and Europol, joined the JIT in June 2017. The terms of the JIT were negotiated and drafted by Eurojust, and Eurojust also provided funding for the JIT.

Europol provided extensive analytical support to the JIT throughout its operation, and held two operational meetings in The Hague to discuss the law enforcement response to the OCG. Europol supported the action day by providing dedicated analysts for the operation and deploying its mobile office to the UK Command & Control Centre. Information gathered during the day of action was analysed and exchanged in real time and immediately cross-matched. A coordination centre was held at Eurojust, with support provided by Eurojust's National Desks and Operations Unit.

Today's action :

- 5 Member States: Belgium, Bulgaria, France, the Netherlands and the UK
- 26 suspects were arrested: 8 in Belgium, 7 in Bulgaria, 11 in the UK
- 6 European Arrest Warrants were executed
- 42 searches were carried out: 13 in Belgium, 7 in Bulgaria, 22 in the UK
- Several illegal migrants were found during the searches in Belgium and

the UK.

For further information about the actions carried out today in a specific Member State, please contact the press services of the national authorities:

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