

Looted cultural goods: 13 arrests in Bulgaria and Spain

 **Eurojust/Europol joint press release** | [ES](#)

5 November 2018

On 23 October, the national authorities of Bulgaria and Spain, supported from a [coordination centre](#) at Eurojust, arrested 13 people (four in Bulgaria and nine in Spain) and searched 17 properties. More than 30 600 pieces of cultural heritage artefacts, mostly comprising real and counterfeit coins, were seized from an organised crime group (OCG) involved in the looting and illegal trafficking of cultural goods from Bulgarian archaeological sites as well as the online sale of counterfeit goods in Spain. Approximately EUR 180 000 in cash was also seized. The action day was supported by Eurojust and Europol.

The Specialised Prosecution Office of Bulgaria, together with the Investigative Court 1 of Torrent (Valencia), supported by the Provincial Prosecutor's Office in Valencia, coordinated the work of the Spanish Guardia Civil Operational Central Unit and the Bulgarian Investigative Department at the Specialised Prosecution Office, the General Directorate for Combating Organised Crime of Bulgaria, and the General Directorate National Police of Bulgaria, in an action day on 23 October.

As discovered during the investigation, the leaders of the OCG in Spain were living in Valencia; they had links with others in the provinces of Alicante, Murcia, Segovia and Zaragoza, as well as Bulgaria.

Eurojust and Europol were asked to assist in both the Bulgarian and the Spanish proceedings, coordinating judicial and police actions requested from Spain. This cross-border cooperation also led to the arrest of the OCG members residing in Bulgaria. Eurojust held one [coordination meeting](#) to share information, discuss jurisdictional issues and plan the action day to take place within just three weeks.

All of those arrested are accused of membership in a criminal organisation, crimes against protected historical heritage, illegal trafficking of cultural goods, swindling, money laundering, forgery of official documents and alteration in prices in public tenders and auctions.

Seized during the searches were more than 20 000 authentic and forged coins, several vehicles, laptops and other IT equipment, as well as 36 machine dies to produce counterfeit coins, as well as Greek and Roman ceramics and sculptures, helmets, funeral urns, brooches, chandeliers, rings, amulets, arrowheads and spears. In addition, metal detectors were seized, along with other devices used to manufacture coins and other objects and manipulate them to look antique so that they could be sold online. Due to the volume of seized items, other objects still need to be evaluated.

During the action day, European Arrest Warrants, European Investigation Orders and freezing orders were exchanged and executed.

 Photos © Guardia Civil