

Estonia: European support for Estonian railway upgrade

- EIB makes available EUR 95 million for the modernisation of the Estonian railway network.
- Upgrade includes modernisation of the tracks, signalling and traffic control systems.
- Project is located on the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).

The European Investment Bank (EIB) has signed a EUR 95 million, 25-year tenor, loan agreement with the Estonian national railway company Eesti Raudtee. The Estonian Railways will use the funds to modernise tracks and the control-command and signalling systems on most of the Estonian network, as well as carry out the digitalisation of the train management systems. All interventions are located on the TEN-T, including on the North Sea – Baltic Corridor.

Technically speaking, the works include the refurbishment of parts of the **Tallinn-Tartu** line, including the construction of a new bridge on the Emajõgi River. Improved safety measures (including barriers) for level crossings and track refurbishment will allow a speed increase up to 135 km/h on the line, improving passenger service and cutting travel times. The same goes for the **Tapa-Narva** line, where two bridges will be renovated and 54km of tracks will be renewed. Here, too, level crossings will be made safer. Apart from the structural upgrades, new signalling devices will be installed on most of the Estonian network, and train management systems will be digitalised, improving service and safety.

The EIB's Vice President **Thomas Östros** commented: *"In the modal shift away from carbon-based transport, there is a big incentive to offer the best possible conditions to travellers, showing them that there are alternatives to taking the car. The modernisation will not only allow higher speeds on the tracks, but is also expected to improve safety by installing new signalling systems. With the EIB at the heart of financing the transition towards a carbon-neutral Europe, this is a scheme that we are happy to get behind."*

Henrik Hololei, Director-General for Mobility and Transport of the European Commission added: *"Our goal is to ensure railways are an attractive and well-established mobility choice for the future, which is why the European Commission proposed 2021 to be the European Year of Rail. The upgrade to the Estonian railway network signed today, as well as realising the Rail Baltica, will deliver travellers a modern, safe and green alternative to the car. Estonian Railways plays an important part here and continues to be a close and much appreciated partner for the European Commission."*

Erik Laidvee, CEO of Eesti Raudtee, said: *"Our aim is to develop the most convenient, environmental friendly and safe mode of transport in Estonia. We have set in motion a very ambitious investment plan until 2030 that will take our railway infrastructure to a new quality and safety level and the loan*

from European Investment Bank is definitely a big part of realizing it."

The project follows earlier EIB-investments in the Estonian rail sector, including for new rolling stock, which took to the tracks in 2014.

Estonian Railways Ltd is a state-owned company operating since 1870 and it is responsible for railway administration related tasks. Estonian Railways Ltd ensures smooth operation, management and maintenance of the railway infrastructure and efficient traffic management. As the owner of the railway infrastructure, Estonian Railways Ltd holds a central role in functioning of the transit sector and responsibility for maintaining a functioning competitive situation both in passenger and cargo transport.

[#EURegionsWeek 2020: Summary of the second partners' meeting](#)



□Following an overwhelming response to the January to April open call, more than 500 selected partners were invited to a second partners' meeting on 27 May.

Taking into account the difficult situation we are all facing in these times due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the organizers of the #EURegionsWeek hosted the meeting virtually: more than 450 partners were connected and shared their feedback online.

To view the [recording](#) of the meeting and the [slides](#) presented, check the event website [Partners'](#) page!

The organizing team is looking forward to meeting you again virtually on 26 June for a 3rd partners meeting. An invitation to the selected partners will follow.

[Resources on COVID-19 and drug markets](#)

The EMCDDA is producing a series of special reports and briefings on the impact of the [COVID-19](#) pandemic on drug markets. COVID-19 and the related government responses are likely to precipitate impacts that have never been observed before and have therefore not been studied. Currently, there is a lack of data and research to inform the understanding at European and international level on the measures taken by drug producers, traffickers and

suppliers, when significant global events cause disruption to the supply chain. Such disruptions can have important implications for patterns of drug use within the EU, the associated health, social and security problems, and for policy and operational responses.

Last updated: 28 May 2020

Overview – assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on drug markets

In the context of the recent global events linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EMCDDA recognised an urgent need to understand the impact of these developments on drug markets in order to anticipate emerging threats and meet immediate and longer-term data needs for policy-making and operational responses.

As well as improving responses to the current crisis this will also help strengthen our capacity to understand, foresee and forewarn how drug markets react to rapid global changes. Overall, the EMCDDA's objective is to strengthen EU-level preparedness and response to drug market changes. This must be done rapidly and at a time when many of our conventional data collection sources are facing operational difficulties.

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EMCDDA publications

The effect of COVID-19 on drug markets in the EU

The effect COVID-19 is having on the EU's largest criminal market is explored in [EU Drug Markets: Impact of COVID-19](#), produced jointly with Europol. The analysis reports higher prices, local shortages and reduced purity for some drugs, while noting continued violence among suppliers and distributors. It also shows how organised crime groups remain active and resilient, by 'adapting transportation models, trafficking routes and concealment methods', even during the pandemic.

The EMCDDA and Europol are working together to improve our understanding of drug market developments under COVID-19 and their impact on internal security and public health in the EU. The findings are based on opinions collected through a targeted EMCDDA online survey of drug experts in the EU Member States, Europol's operational intelligence gathering on organised crime and structured monitoring of open source information. [Read the accompanying news release](#).

Drug supply via darknet markets

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted on our daily lives, including our behaviour as consumers. Just as we have seen online shopping for other goods increase during lockdowns, will we see a similar shift when it comes to illicit drugs? In a special report, [Drug supply via darknet markets](#), we

explore whether established methods of drug supply and distribution to consumers have changed during recent restrictions on movement ([read the accompanying news release](#)).

The report analyses activity on three darknet markets (Agartha, Cannazon and Versus) in the first three months of 2020. As the situation is evolving rapidly, the review does not provide a comprehensive overview of the topic but rather preliminary evidence and a snapshot of developments to date.

The EMCDDA and [its partner Europol](#) are working together to produce a broader and more rigorous assessment of the darknet ecosystem. An update of this analysis will offer further insights into how darknet drug sales are impacted by the current pandemic.

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Related resources

You may find below some useful resources related to COVID-19 and drug markets.

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[Eurojust steps up the fight against migrant smuggling](#)

 The Hague, 29 May 2020

To further strengthen the fight against migrant smuggling, Eurojust, the EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, has launched a new initiative: the Focus Group for Prosecutors on Migrant Smuggling. It will serve as an important hub to regularly connect the key judicial actors at national level in the EU Member States who are responsible for tackling migrant smuggling crimes, to support their joint operational response.

For a successful outcome in tackling migrant smuggling, it is essential that judicial and law enforcement authorities from all countries concerned work closely together. In order to tap the full potential of EU judicial cooperation tools, including setting up joint investigation teams (JITs) and using the European Arrest Warrant (EAW) and the European Investigation Order (EIO), a strategic and carefully managed approach is required. It needs to build on lessons learned and good practices and take the shifting modus operandi of criminal networks into account.

The Focus Group, composed of prosecutors specialised in migrant smuggling from all EU Member States, will bring together all concerned actors in the

security and criminal justice chain to regularly

- share **best practices** from landmark migrant smuggling investigations;
- analyse **trends and new developments in the operational tactics** of organised crime groups (OCGs) active in migrant smuggling;
- study the impact of **shifts in migrant smuggling routes**; and
- gather input from practitioners on **current challenges and opportunities** of judicial cooperation related to this cross-border crime.

In addition to facilitating regular information exchange, supporting the analytical work and ensuring the functioning of the Focus Group, Eurojust will host an annual meeting at its premises in The Hague, the first of which will take place in November 2020.

Filippo Spiezia, Vice-President of Eurojust and Chairman of Eurojust's Anti-Trafficking Team, stated:

'The European Union is built on the process of gradually linking our know-how, resources and destinies. The Focus Group for Prosecutors on Migrant Smuggling has been set up by Eurojust precisely in this spirit, with a very pragmatic, action-oriented purpose.'

Smuggling of migrants is not only a crime against international conventions and the interest of the States to control and protect their borders, but also a crime against human dignity, because smugglers exploit vulnerable individuals and their expectations for a better life.'

With the Focus Group, we wish to bring together all actors in the security and criminal justice chain across the EU to advance the Union's response against these hideous crimes.'

I am confident that this platform will further enhance Eurojust's capacity to support the competent national authorities to investigate, prosecute and disrupt criminal organisations that are behind migrant smuggling, along all the countries on the routes concerned. Together, everyone achieves more.'

Background

✘ In the [European Council of October 2018](#), EU leaders decided to step up the crackdown on migrant smuggling at EU level. On [6 December 2018, the Justice and Home Affairs Council of the European Union](#) approved a 'comprehensive and operational set of measures' to advance the response to migrant smuggling networks, based on an enhanced inter-agency approach both at EU and national level.

Eurojust is at the centre of the judicial component of implementing this intensified operational response. One of the adopted measures includes a call for Eurojust 'to continue facilitating the networking of practitioners to foster the exchange of best practice, identify challenges and lessons learned in investigation and prosecuting migrant smuggling cases, including by considering the necessity to set up a prosecutors' network to that end' ([Council document 15250/18](#)).

Migrant smuggling is also one of the priority areas of action of the [EU policy cycle to fight serious organised crime \(EMPACT\)](#) for 2015-2020.

The objective is to disrupt migrant smuggling networks both inside and outside the EU, taking into account their high level of adaptability and the increased interlinking of different criminal activities (including drug trafficking and money laundering).

Migrant smuggling cases supported by Eurojust

Using the full spectrum of judicial cooperation tools available, in 2019, Eurojust supported the Member States with the coordination of 187 investigations of migrant smuggling crimes, 86 of which were started in 2019, while 101 were ongoing from previous years.

12 joint investigation teams focussing on migrant smuggling criminal groups received financial and operational support. Eurojust has also supported the development of a tailor-made JIT model agreement to facilitate the formation of further JITs in migrant smuggling.

Please also see:

- [Infographic](#) on strengthening collaboration in the fight against migrant smuggling in Europe
- [Case illustration](#) of a simultaneous action against a migrant smuggling ring (2019)
- Relevant press releases from the past two years:

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