

*estratto a cura di Carlo Felice Corsetti*-----

## CRACKDOWN ON ORGANISED CRIME IN THE GREATER MANCHESTER AREA

28 marzo 2014

In a week-long crackdown on organised crime affecting the UK's North West, Europol have joined forces with the Greater Manchester Police (GMP), Immigration Enforcement, the National Crime Agency and other UK agencies, to undertake a series of raids, visits and safeguarding checks as part of Operation Challenger - the region's biggest ever approach to tackling organised crime.

More than 40 warrants were carried out to disrupt and dismantle organised crime groups involved in illegal immigration, sham marriages, drugs and the exploitation of some of the most vulnerable in society.

The week of action not only utilised close collaboration between partner agencies to identify and detain known criminals but to visit high risk areas and work with potential victims of exploitation to offer protection and prevention advice. The week was also an effective tool in gathering further evidence and intelligence in the continuing attack on the criminal networks operating in Greater Manchester.

Since Monday 24 March there have been 78 arrests – 45 immigration-related and 33 for other organised crimes. Drugs with a street value of more than GBP 285 000 and more than GBP 70 000 in cash was seized. Further disruption to organised crime groups was delivered in the form of GBP 100 000 in fines served to businesses in the region. Further arrests and seizures are likely to be declared in coming days.

The effectiveness of this operation's cooperative approach was particularly highlighted by the success around visits to car washes across Greater Manchester, where the link between illegal immigration and other forms of organised crime was most clearly illustrated. Car washes in Salford, Wigan and Oldham were visited, where a number of illegal workers were discovered. With the quick response and assistance of partner agencies, offences including drugs, benefit fraud and a potential sham marriage were also uncovered through those visits.

In addition to arrests and raids, Challenger's delivery of effective prevention and enforcement activity was most prominently reflected this week via operations in a number of local areas. In Wigan, whilst conducting harm reduction visits, the GMP Child Sexual Exploitation Unit arrested one man for both child sexual exploitation and drugs offences, and another man was arrested for grooming offences. Tuesday saw a flurry of activity in Bolton, where six arrests were made for offences including human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

During the investigation phase, Europol facilitated information exchange and provided analytical support. For the action week, Europol was present with two officers on the spot to carry out cross-checks of data and to provide forensic support on telecommunication devices and computers.

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## EUROPEAN CYBERCRIME CENTRE AT EUROPOL WARNS ABOUT WINDOWS XP SECURITY RISKS

28 marzo 2014 - The Hague, The Netherlands

The European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) at Europol warns about security risks related to the end of Windows XP support. After 8 April 2014, Windows will stop supporting its Windows XP operating system. This means that from that day forward, security vulnerabilities will not be fixed, leaving computers potentially vulnerable to attacks. Since Windows XP is still the second

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most popular operating system in use, the number of potential victims is cause for serious concern. Therefore, the EC3 advises Windows XP users to upgrade or change their operating system before 8 April.

According to Troels Oerting, Head of EC3, the April deadline will work as a red flag for hackers. "People have to realise that if they connect to the Internet with a Windows XP machine after 8 April, they will become easy targets for hackers. This goes for individuals as well as for companies and government services. If you realise you can no longer lock your front door, you call a locksmith to change it. This is the same."

This warning was echoed by Wil van Gemert, Director Cyber Security at the Ministry of Security and Justice, responsible for the Dutch National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC): "Our core message to businesses and government organisations is to stop using Windows XP. And we've been putting out that message since last year. That is why the NCSC has published factsheets in both English and Dutch with strict advice on this issue. But we realise that there are still organisations that run Windows XP because of legacy applications that do not work on newer versions of Windows, financial constraints or other reasons. The very least they should do is reduce the risk by limiting the access and functionality of their Windows XP machines."

Whenever Microsoft releases security updates for supported versions of Windows such as Windows 7, attackers will reverse engineer those updates, find the vulnerabilities and test Windows XP to see if it shares those vulnerabilities. If it does, attackers will attempt to develop exploit code that can take advantage of those vulnerabilities on Windows XP. Since a security update will never become available for Windows XP to address these vulnerabilities, antivirus software will not provide full protection.

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### INTERNATIONAL ACTION AGAINST MOBILE PHONE THIEVES

28 marzo 2014 - The Hague, the Netherlands

In a European day of action, coordinated police operations have taken place in 8 EU countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Romania and the UK) against individuals and gangs behind the theft of smart phones.

In total 213 individuals have been arrested under the auspices of Operation Ringtone (including 120 in the UK, 33 in Bulgaria, 10 in Germany, 3 in Romania where an additional 120 suspects were identified, and 1 in Sweden) and 2401 mobile phones seized.

Europol cooperated closely with participating EU Member States, coordinating activities from the operational centre in The Hague on 20 March 2014. Europol also provided on-the-spot support through the deployment of a mobile office, enabling real-time access to Europol's databases.

Information about identified criminals and the volume of mobile phone crime has been shared between Europol and a large number of countries for some time. Several coordination meetings were held as it was recognised that police forces across Europe were experiencing the same problems, probably caused by many of the same criminals. In an effort to reduce the volume of such crimes it was decided to target the organised criminal networks involved, who frequently change their operational bases to avoid capture or detection by police.

Director of Europol, Rob Wainwright, says: "Organised crime has many faces. What sometimes seems just an example of petty crime is often part of a larger conspiracy orchestrated by international criminal networks. Europol has been pleased to support the EU countries involved in this case by using its intelligence capabilities and coordination services to identify the pan-European network behind these crimes committed all over Europe."

The Metropolitan Police Service Commander Christine Jones, who has been leading Operation Ringtone in London for the past year, said: "Operation Ringtone is not simply about mobile phone crime in London, but that which is committed across Europe.

"It is a fantastic, progressive and innovative operation. Not only are we working in London and with police forces across the country to tackle mobile phone crime, but through incredible work by our staff and partners we now have reach into Europe to tackle those criminals who attempt to exploit free movement in order to commit offences, often travelling to London and other UK cities for that purpose.

"Our Europol, European and National Crime Agency partners have been outstanding in both recognising the crime reduction and detection opportunities of our joint activity, and in providing leadership and impetus in targeting those individuals, of whatever nationality, who are intent on preying on our communities across Europe."

Police encourage mobile phone owners to use a security PIN or lock code to prevent their phones being used if stolen, and activate or install tracking applications, which uses GPS to locate your phone if stolen. These apps can lead police straight to the criminal.

The police forces participating in the operation are also focusing on the second-hand stolen goods market.

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**TACKLING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY CRIMES IN SPORT**

26 marzo 2014

With just four months to go to the World Cup, the issue of counterfeiting and piracy in the sports industry is taking centre stage at a major conference organised by the Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market (OHIM) and Europol.

The sports industry and related activities contribute EUR 294 billion to the EU's GDP every year and supports over 4.5 million jobs across Europe.

Counterfeiting of sports articles and piracy of sport intellectual property (IP) rights are also bringing substantial illegal benefits to criminal networks.

To support tackling IP crimes in sports, OHIM through the European Observatory on Infringements of Intellectual Property Rights, and Europol are gathering experts from sports companies, experienced investigators and enforcement officers from across the EU and abroad in Alicante, from 26 to 28 March 2014.

Major European and international authorities, notably including the Brazilian National Council on Combating Piracy, the European Commission, as well as the World Intellectual Property Organisation and the World Customs Organisation, will be represented at the event.

Paul Maier, Director of the Observatory said: "Great sporting events like the World Cup are enjoyed by fans all round the world. However, such events also attract illegal activities such as the counterfeiting of products destined to fans and followers as well as the illegal retransmissions of images. Therefore we need to bring the public and private sector together to try to stamp out IP infringements in sport. Through our own research in the Observatory we know that IP-rights intensive industries, of which the sporting industry is a part, create nearly a third of all EU jobs and contribute over a third of the EU's GDP. Events like this one – and the upcoming International IP Enforcement Summit co-hosted by the UK Government and the European Commission, to be held in London in June – are fundamental in building strategies to combat counterfeiting and piracy at a global level".

The Director of Europol, Rob Wainwright says: "Consumers need to be aware that a counterfeit sports product is a substandard product which will most likely not last long and may even cause

physical discomfort due to the non-tested materials they contain. Furthermore, consumers risk supporting criminal organisations that use the profits to invest in other crime areas such as drugs and trafficking in human beings. By purchasing fake merchandise online, consumers also run the risk of having their credit card details stolen and used for other transactions.”

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## **CRIMINAL GROUP OF ONLINE FRAUDSTERS DISMANTLED**

25 marzo 2014

From 19 to 22 March, the Polish National Police, the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) at Europol, and eBay, joined forces to successfully dismantle a criminal group responsible for a spate of sophisticated online auction frauds across Europe and beyond.

Hundreds of victims from at least 15 countries including Poland, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Spain, UK, USA, Canada and India, were potentially affected by the scam, involving the fictitious sale of electronic items via online auctions hosted on eBay and other online Polish platforms. After making electronic payments for goods such as Apple Mac computers, customers were instead sent items such as bricks, fruit and vegetables. In the case of eBay customers, nothing at all was sent. Once electronic funds were received by the fraudsters, they were transferred to unregistered pre-paid cards and cash was withdrawn via ATMs. Customers shopping on eBay are protected by a Money Back Guarantee but the fraud exposure would otherwise have amounted to tens of thousands of euros since 2013.

Despite the criminals' sophisticated attempts to mask their online identities and activities, using an intelligence-led approach, Police from Lubin and Pulawy in Poland, alongside EC3 cyber experts and eBay representatives, carried out a series of strikes against the group. Two key suspects were arrested in Pulawy while attempting to withdraw fraudulently obtained cash from an ATM. Subsequent house searches led to the seizure of items including anonymous pre-paid cards, cars, laptops, mobile phones.

EC3 cyber experts assisted Polish law enforcement authorities by providing on-the-spot expertise and real time access to Europol's databases. eBay also supported the case from their Dublin operations centre by assisting police to trace criminal online activity via live monitoring systems.

“This successful case is a perfect example of very effective cooperation between eBay, the Polish National Police and the EC3 in a crime that affected victims from more than 15 countries on three continents. By working together, sharing information and coordinating this investigation in multiple jurisdictions we have proven that the criminals might be able to run but they can't hide. Together with eBay and other companies operating online, and the hard-working cybercrime experts in the EU Member States and abroad, we will continue to optimise our investigative methods and put more criminals behind bars,” said Troels Oerting, Head of the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) at Europol.

EC3 would like to praise the Polish police investigators and technical staff at eBay for their dedication and professionalism displayed during the execution of this operation.

The success of this operation will undoubtedly impact citizens across Europe and beyond as they see yet another organised criminal group removed from the rapidly expanding e-commerce sector. It also provides a warning to those engaged in online fraud - with such a significant increase in international multi-agency cooperation, anonymity for criminals on the Internet is fast becoming a thing of the past.

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## **EUROPOL AND AMERIPOL STRENGTHEN COOPERATION AGAINST ORGANISED CRIME**

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21 marzo 2014 - The Hague, the Netherlands

As part of the efforts to enhance law enforcement cooperation in the fight against international organised crime and terrorism, Europol Director, Rob Wainwright, today hosted a visit by Juan José Andrade Morales, President of AMERIPOL, the Police Community of the Americas. Both Europol and AMERIPOL recognise the importance of cooperation and sharing to ensure a more effective approach to combating the common threats faced by the countries of Europe and the Americas. Today's visit therefore aims to build on the existing relationship through focusing on:

- Capacity-building in the American countries to mitigate security threats to/originating from the region
- Fostering strengthened cooperation among the American countries as well as with European/Schengen countries in the area of internal security
- Cooperation resulting in a better understanding and more effective approach to combating the common threats posed by organised crime and terrorism
- Supporting capacity building for cooperation and information exchange among the law enforcement authorities of the AMERIPOL countries as well as within the wider European security area including EU and Schengen Member States, based on European and international standards.

Director Wainwright and President Morales also discussed common efforts to develop regional police bodies in the world as part of a coherent international police cooperation in which INTERPOL also plays a key role.

Following today's fruitful discussions in The Hague, the AMERIPOL delegation then had the opportunity to explore Europol's specialist operational facilities including the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3).

Europol Director, Rob Wainwright, said: "Europol is proud to be associated with one of its sister organisations in the world and welcomes the opportunity to play its part in strengthening international police cooperation."

In 2010, Europol concluded an operational agreement with its first Latin American partner country, Colombia, also a member of AMERIPOL. This has been instrumental in developing a new level of cooperation for fighting organised crime such as currency counterfeiting and drug trafficking. Colombia has therefore been designated by AMERIPOL as Europol's point of contact.

During the meeting, President Morales presented Mr Wainwright with a decoration of honour on behalf of AMERIPOL, for his "distinguished services" to police cooperation.

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### EUROPOL DIRECTOR CALLS FOR A FAIR DEAL ON POLICE POWERS TO TACKLE ONLINE CRIME

19 marzo 2014 The Hague, the Netherlands In a debate with national parliamentarians and MEPs in Brussels today Rob Wainwright, the Director of Europol, called for "a fair deal from legislators in giving national and international police authorities the right tools to confront dangerous new forms of organised crime appearing online."

Mr Wainwright expressed concern about police falling behind in its capability to keep pace with

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significant new criminal phenomena because it has not been given the same powers in the virtual world as it has in the real world to deal with major fraud, child sexual abuse and other forms of international crime.

The Europol Director advocated for police bodies to retain public trust by operating with increased transparency and accountability and with the highest standards of data privacy, but within a framework that also allows it to guarantee basic levels of security for citizens. He also urged national authorities to invest more in regional and international police cooperation bodies such as Europol and INTERPOL.

The debate took place within the context of the future of Europol and the proposed new Europol Regulation currently being negotiated. The objective is to adjust the legal framework of Europol with the requirements of the Treaty of Lisbon, which will result in a strengthening of Europol's democratic legitimacy and accountability. The proposal also aims to further strengthen Europol's robust data protection regime and its operational capabilities. This will reinforce Europol's current tasks but also its future responsibilities in particular those relating to becoming a centre of specialised law enforcement expertise.

In February 2014, the European Parliament adopted its position on the proposed Europol Regulation, strengthening the data protection safeguards, spelling out in greater detail the joint parliamentary scrutiny by the European Parliament and the national Parliaments.

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### INTERNATIONAL POLICE OPERATION BUSTS COLOMBIAN CURRENCY COUNTERFEITERS

17 marzo 2014 - The Hague, the Netherlands

Working with Europol, Spain's Brigada de Investigacion del Banco de Espana (BIBE) and the US Secret Service, Colombian National Police have dismantled an illegal digital print shop producing counterfeit currency.

Early on 13 March 2014, 50 police officers raided seven premises in the suburbs south of Bogotá, where six Colombian citizens were arrested (four males, two females). In addition, officers seized:

- counterfeit 100 euro banknotes with a face value of EUR 609 600
- counterfeit 100 dollar bills with a face value of USD 900 000
- 347 million counterfeit Colombian pesos (value EUR 121 900)
- uncut sheets of counterfeit euro banknotes, in EUR 50 and EUR 500 denominations
- 41 fake Colombian ID cards and five counterfeit U.S visas
- printers and computer equipment, guillotine cutters, plus other material for producing counterfeit currency and documents such as rolls of imitation security thread, holographic foils, clichés and specialist paper.

Europol provided analytical, financial and forensic support to the investigation, with a Europol specialist present in Bogotá to examine seized currency and equipment.

Europol's Director, Rob Wainwright, commented on the outcome: "The success of this operation demonstrates the joint commitment of Colombia, Europol and its international law enforcement

partners to the fight against currency counterfeiting. Further operational cooperation with Colombian authorities and other regional partners such as Ameripol will ensure the best response to tackle the organised criminal groups that undermine our security and economies.” Previously, years of skilled apprenticeship and access to expensive professional printing equipment were a prerequisite for engaging in the production of counterfeit banknotes. But now there is an apparent shift by Colombian counterfeiters who have moved from traditional offset printing methods to digital production.

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-----CRIMINAL GROUPS EXTORT**EUROPEAN RELATIVES OF KIDNAP VICTIMS**

04 marzo 2014 - The Hague, the Netherlands

Europol has warned EU law enforcement authorities about the kidnapping of irregular migrants and the subsequent extortion of their relatives or friends who are residing in Europe.

In the cases known to law enforcement, ransoms extorted from the European contacts have ranged from EUR 4400 to EUR 25 700. In most cases, the extortion processes involved multiple negotiation steps and sequential increases in the ransom amount. Payments were made to multiple cash handlers used by organised criminal groups in locations inside and outside of Europe.

Based on data provided by national law enforcement authorities it is clear that individuals of Eritrean origin living in Sweden and at least two other European countries have been subject to extortion as relatives for Eritrean kidnapping victims held hostage and exposed to torture in the Sinai Peninsula. The extortion operations were run by organised crime groups (OCGs) of Bedouin origin exploiting irregular migrants who had been kidnapped in Eritrea and Sudan by OCGs of Rashaida origin.

“Europol has issued a warning to all police forces in Europe that this form of international extortion may also be happening in their areas,” says Rob Wainwright, Director of Europol. “In response to any increase in cases reported to national competent authorities in Europe, the centralised analysis of this data at Europol would enable the detection of cross-border links between different cash handlers. Europol is ready for coordinated action with Interpol to deal with the problem in Europe and the Sinai region.”

Cecilia Malmström, European Commission for Home Affairs, comments: “This is a worrying and sad phenomenon – a terrible tragedy that is also having direct consequences in our Member States. It needs to be tackled from every possible angle. I would like to call for more cooperation between Member States, in particular regarding the extortion of individuals and the organised crime groups operating within Europe that support and perpetuate the horrendous practices occurring in the Sinai”.

In some cases, hostages have been provided with phones to call their European contacts and request payment for their release. In other cases, the relatives have been extorted by cash handlers that are based in Europe and working for Bedouin criminal groups operating in the Sinai Peninsula. For instance, a victim’s friend located in Sweden was contacted by two Swedish-speaking suspects on local mobile phone numbers demanding EUR 24 000 for a victim being held in the Sinai. Threatening that non-compliance would result in the victim’s death and sale of the victim’s organs, the suspects attempted to arrange face-to-face meetings in Sweden for the handover of ransom payments. Subsequently, the relative was sent regular threat messages via SMS and presented with a shortened deadline. In this case, the victim was killed and the transaction was not completed.

While the dark figure for the extortion of the European contacts of hostages in the Sinai may be

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considerably higher, the number of cases recorded by law enforcement authorities is low. Increased public awareness may encourage affected individuals to come forward and report these incidents of extortion.