

JOINT LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION TO TACKLE PEOPLE SMUGGLING NETWORK IN GREECE

The criminal group was suspected of facilitating the illegal entry into the EU of migrants mainly Syrian via maritime routes from Turkey to Greece

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On 10-11 March 2015, Greek law enforcement authorities, with the support of Europol, dismantled an organized criminal group suspected of facilitating the entry of irregular migrants - mainly Syrian nationals - into Greece from Turkey via maritime routes. The group also smuggled victims from Greece to other EU Member States through a range of methods, and was involved in the production and distribution of forged travel documents and their trading to other organized criminal groups. The criminal network operated in Greece and was formed of members from several countries including Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Romania.

During the coordinated law enforcement action that took place in various locations in Greece, 16 suspects were arrested (2 Romanians, 2 Egyptians, 2 Pakistanis, 7 Syrians, 1 Indian, 1 Filipino and 1 Iraqi) and 20 premises were searched. Police seized significant evidence including around 280 passports and identity cards of persons from various EU countries, 82 mobile phones, 25 computers and tablets, 6 printers, various cars and motorcycles, EUR 64 000 in cash and EUR 154 714 in bank cheques and bank deposits.

This operation is an important crackdown on illegal immigration into the European Union across the Mediterranean Sea. The investigation revealed that the criminal organization was responsible for the illegal immigration of around 350 migrants, mainly Syrian nationals. Migrants were smuggled from Turkey into Greece to the islands of Rhodes and Kos - by using different types of boats. Once on Greek soil, migrants were smuggled onwards to other EU countries by plane - using forged and original travel documents - or hidden inside trucks which were sent to Italy on private vessels and liner ships or by land. Investigations revealed that each migrant was charged from EUR 4000 up to a maximum of EUR 9000 for the travel, depending on the destination and documents required. The criminal group could have earned around **EUR 7.5 million** in illegal profits.

The joint action is part of a long-running investigation into people smuggling named Operation DAIDALOS, led by the Attica Aliens Division in Greece. Europol has actively supported the investigation for over a year and provided extensive operational and analytical support to the countries involved.

"This action sends the clear message that Europol and its partners are determined to pursue those responsible for these terrible crimes," says Rob Wainwright, Director of Europol. "The events in the Mediterranean Sea emphasise the need for a coordinated approach in targeting these criminal groups. Europol has reinforced its capabilities to support EU Member States' investigations in this area and has set-up the Joint Operational Team Mare, dedicated to tackling organised criminal groups responsible for the arrival by sea of large numbers of irregular migrants."

Dimitris Avramopoulos, Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship said: "This operation is a great early example of how the European Commission, the agencies and the Member States can, together, do more and better to counter migrant smuggling through Joint Operational Team (JOT) Mare. Operation DAIDALOS has led to the arrest and dismantling of a multinational criminal group suspected of facilitating the entry of irregular migrants and collecting millions of euros from smuggling and related criminal activities. Doing more to counter people smuggling is a priority for the European Commission and it will also be one of the main pillars of the European Agenda on Migration that we will adopt in May this year."

To assist the operation on the ground, Europol deployed a mobile office and an analyst to Greece, allowing for real-time information exchange and immediate cross-checks of all data gathered.

