



**IECLO**

**International & European  
Criminal Law Observatory**

ON CULTURAL ISSUES, HUMAN RIGHTS AND SECURITY

## **MONTHLY WRAP DECEMBER 2024**

### **UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL**

#### [S/RES/2761\(2024\)](#)

On 6 December the Security Council decided to maintain the exemption of humanitarian aid providers from asset freeze measures imposed by the Da'esh and Al-Qaida sanctions regime — a decision that provides those personnel and entities with greater operational clarity and predictability, while maintaining systematic monitoring measures to prevent the carveout from being exploited by terrorist organizations. Through the unanimous adoption of resolution 2761 (2024) under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, the Council decided that the provisions introduced by paragraph 1 of resolution 2664 (2022) shall continue to apply to the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions regime, reiterating the importance of monitoring the implementation of these provisions. It called on all States to cooperate fully with the 1267/1989/2253 Sanctions Committee and its Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team in the fulfilment of its tasks. Taking into account reported cases of abuse of non-profit organizations, including as front organizations to raise, move or transfer funds by and for ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and their affiliates, the Council further affirmed the importance of its consideration of any information, including possible violations.

#### [S/RES/2764\(2024\)](#)

On 20 December the Security Council adopted a resolution highlighting the need for sustainable child protection capacities in United Nations peace operations and the importance of their smooth, responsible transfer to the Organization's country teams during mission transitions or withdrawals. Unanimously adopting resolution 2764 (2024), the Council condemned all violations of applicable international law involving the recruitment and use of children by parties to armed conflict, as well as their re-recruitment, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abductions and attacks against schools and hospitals. The 15-member organ further called for "strengthened coordination" among key stakeholders to "ensure the continuity, effectiveness, and sustainability of child protection activities." These actors include the heads of UN peace operations, the Office of the



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Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Co-Chairs of the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting, as well as relevant Governments and authorities.

## **UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

### [A/ES-10/L.33](#)

The General Assembly adopted two key resolutions on 5 December, demanding an immediate, unconditional, and permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the release of all hostages. It also reaffirmed its full support for the embattled UN agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA). In adopting the resolution entitled “Demand for ceasefire in Gaza”, the 193-member Assembly also demanded all parties “fully comply with international law”, including international humanitarian law, especially as it relates to protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. The resolution was the second explicit demand for a ceasefire by the Assembly at the resumed special session, since the outbreak of the war in Gaza on 7 Oct 2023. It was adopted with 158 nations in favour and nine against, with 13 abstentions. The resolution further demanded that parties “fully, unconditionally and without delay” implement all the provisions of Security Council resolution 2735, regarding an immediate ceasefire, the release of hostages, the exchange of Palestinian prisoners, the return of hostage remains; the return of Palestinian civilians to their homes and neighbourhoods in all areas of Gaza, including in the north; and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

### [UN General Assembly adopts milestone cybercrime treaty](#)

The General Assembly on 24 December adopted the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime, a landmark global treaty aimed at strengthening international cooperation to combat cybercrime and protecting societies from digital threats. The agreement on the legally binding treaty marked the culmination of a five-year effort by UN Member States, with inputs from civil society, information security experts, academia and the private sector. The Convention against Cybercrime acknowledges the significant risks posed by the misuse of information and communications technologies (ICT), which enable criminal activities on an unprecedented scale, speed, and scope. It highlights the adverse impacts such crimes can have on States, enterprises, and the well-being of individuals and society, and focuses on protecting them from offenses such as terrorism, human trafficking, drug smuggling



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and online financial crimes. It also recognises the growing impact of cybercrime on victims and prioritises justice, especially for vulnerable groups. It further underscores the need for technical assistance, capacity-building and collaboration among States and other stakeholders.

## UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

### [Iran: UN experts call for strict new hijab law to be repealed](#)

Iranian women and girls now face prison terms of up to 15 years and possible death sentences for failing to wear a hijab, through a new strict law on religious dress and behaviour. Independent UN Human Rights Council-appointed experts said in a statement that it represents a fundamental attack on women's rights. The legislation, which applies to children as young as 12, combines severe criminal penalties with mandatory citizen surveillance and systematic enforcement across all sectors of society, the experts added. The Law on Protecting the Family through the Promotion of the Culture of Chastity and Hijab, represents what experts describe as "an intensification of State control over women's bodies in Iran and a further assault on women's rights and freedoms". The new legislation expands existing restrictions, targeting women and girls who fail to wear a hijab in both physical and online spaces. While the hijab requirements were already mandatory under Iran's Islamic Penal Code, this new law introduces dramatically harsher consequences. Violations can now result in extended prison sentences of up to 15 years and substantially increased fines. Most concerning to human rights experts is the provision allowing judges to impose the death penalty under the charge of "corruption on earth".

## UNITED NATIONS AD HOC TRIBUNALS

### [Appointment Of New Judge to the Roster and to the Specialist Chamber of the Constitutional Court](#)

On December 3, 2024, Major General Giovanni Pietro Barbano, the Appointing Authority, appointed Judge Piotr Hofmański (Poland) to the Roster of International Judges of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC). This appointment follows the resignation of Judge Antonio Balsamo from the Specialist Chamber of the Constitutional Court (SCCC) for professional reasons. Judge Hofmański replaces Judge Balsamo as one of the three Constitutional Court Judges. The President of the KSC,



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Judge Ekaterina Trendafilova, welcomed Judge Hofmański and expressed eagerness to work with him. Judge Hofmański's biography is available on the KSC website.

## [SPO Conducts Operations in Investigation of Administration-of-Justice Offences](#)

The Specialist Prosecutor's Office (SPO) is conducting ongoing operations in Kosovo in an investigation focusing on offences against the administration of justice. The SPO operations have been judicially authorised by the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC) and supported by the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX).

## [Hashim Thaçi, Bashkim Smakaj, Isni Kilaj, Fadil Fazliu and Hajredin Kuçi Indicted for Influencing Witnesses – First Initial Appearances on Sunday](#)

On November 29, 2024, a Pre-Trial Judge of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers confirmed an indictment against Hashim Thaçi, Bashkim Smakaj, Fadil Fazliu, Isni Kilaj, and Hajredin Kuçi, related to alleged efforts to influence witness testimonies in the Thaçi et al. war crimes trial. Arrest warrants were issued for four of the accused, while Kuçi was summoned. Smakaj, Fazliu, and Kilaj were arrested on December 5 and transferred to KSC Detention Facilities on December 6, with support from EULEX. Thaçi was served with his arrest warrant at the KSC on December 5, while Kuçi was summoned for an initial appearance. The indictment alleges that between April 12 and November 2, 2023, Thaçi provided confidential information to the others during unprivileged visits to influence witnesses' testimonies. Thaçi is charged with obstructing official duties, violating the secrecy of proceedings, and contempt of court. Smakaj, Fazliu, and Kilaj face charges of obstruction and contempt, while Kuçi is charged with two counts of contempt. Initial appearances for four of the accused are scheduled for December 8 and 9, 2024. The hearings will be public and available online, with a 10-minute delay, or can be attended in person.

## [SPO Charges Thaçi with Obstruction Offences; Arrests Smakaj, Kilaj And Fazliu in Kosovo; and Summons Kuçi](#)

The Specialist Prosecutor's Office (SPO) has charged Hashim Thaçi with obstruction of justice, including three counts of obstructing official duties, four counts of violating secrecy of proceedings, and four counts of contempt of court, following a confirmed indictment. Thaçi was served with the arrest warrant at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers' Detention Facilities and will appear before a Pre-



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Trial Judge for these charges. Bashkim Smakaj, Isni Kilaj, and Fadil Fazliu were also arrested in Kosovo under arrest warrants and transferred to the KSC Detention Facilities in The Hague. They are charged with attempted obstruction of official duties and contempt of court. Hajredin Kuçi has been summoned for two counts of contempt of court. EULEX and Kosovo Police supported the SPO in these operations. The SPO emphasized its commitment to prosecuting anyone involved in obstructing justice.

### [Mandate Of President Ekaterina Trendafilova Renewed](#)

General Giovanni Barbano, the Appointing Authority, reappointed Judge Ekaterina Trendafilova as President of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC) for a four-year term starting December 16, 2024. Her current term ends on December 15, 2024. President Trendafilova expressed gratitude for the continued trust placed in her and reaffirmed her commitment to ensuring the KSC's proceedings remain fair, efficient, and in line with its legal framework. She also thanked the Judges, Registrar, and staff for their dedicated work in fulfilling the KSC's mandate.

## **INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

### [IACHR reiterates concern over escalating security crisis in Haiti](#)

The IACHR once again expressed its deep concern over the upsurge in violent attacks by armed gangs in Haiti. It urges the State to take action to guarantee citizen security, as this is a critical condition for achieving stable democratic rule in the country. According to the latest report from the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti, armed gang violence spread beyond the capital in October 2024, affecting several departments. The IACHR pack is particularly alarmed by the heightened risk of gender-based violence, with reports of women being used as weapons of extortion by armed groups according to the United Nations Population Fund. This escalating violence and security crisis has also forced the suspension of humanitarian aid delivery, exacerbating the already dire humanitarian crisis that the country is experiencing. The IACHR acknowledges the Haitian State's ongoing efforts to rebuild democratic institutions and the increase in operations by the National Police Force and the Haitian Armed Forces to restore security in the country, with support from the Multinational Security Support Mission deployed since June. However, the IACHR remains deeply concerned about the prevailing uncertainty and instability in the country in response to the change in leadership. It urges the Haitian



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State to adopt comprehensive measures to guarantee the security of its population, in meaningful consultation with the full range of civil society organizations. It also renews its appeal to the international community to step up efforts to support Haiti in addressing the severe security, food, and health crises that continue to threaten the lives and dignity of the population.

## OSCE

### [OSCE supports Ukraine in preventing and combating illicit trafficking of weapons, ammunition and explosives](#)

On 11 December 2024, the Second National Conference on Preventing and Combating Illicit Trafficking in Arms, Ammunition and Explosives (WAE), organised by the OSCE and the European Union Advisory Mission to Ukraine, took place in Kiev. Over 100 representatives of the Ukrainian authorities, international organisations, diplomatic missions and civil society attended the event, aimed at strengthening the WAE control system in Ukraine through dialogue, coordination and cooperation. The conference covered recent legislative changes, Ukraine's accession to international obligations and the resolution of the main challenges in the field. The importance of strengthening the capacities of the Ukrainian authorities to facilitate the effective exchange of transparent data was highlighted. Oleksii Serheiev, Deputy Interior Minister, stressed Ukraine's priority in addressing security challenges, while Shawn DeCaluwe of the OSCE confirmed the organisation's continued support. The event was part of the project 'In support of capacity building of Ukrainian authorities in preventing and combating illicit trafficking in WAE', funded by the European Union and several countries, and implemented in cooperation with several Ukrainian agencies.

### [Human rights situation in Ukraine deteriorates as attacks intensify amid ongoing persecution in Russian-occupied territories: OSCE human rights office](#)

On 13 December 2024, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) released a report on human rights violations in Ukraine, highlighting a worsening situation. The document highlights the increase in civilian casualties due to increased air strikes, including attacks on energy infrastructure, and intensified frontline hostilities. In addition, arbitrary detention, torture and coercion continued in Russian-occupied areas. The report is based on interviews with 94 witnesses and survivors and indicates serious concerns about the detention of thousands of Ukrainian



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civilians by the Russian authorities. Torture and inhuman conditions in detention facilities are widespread, as is the systematic torture of prisoners of war and civilians. Further evidence of sexual violence has also emerged. The ODIHR states that these violations constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, calling all parties involved in the conflict to respect international law.

### [OSCE facilitates exchange visit to Belarus for Tajik border agencies to enhance cross-border co-operation practices](#)

On 5 and 6 December 2024, in Tashkent, the OSCE Transnational Threats Department (TNTD) organised a regional workshop for the Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) on the development of structured approaches for training police officers and prosecutors in the fight against cybercrime and the use of electronic evidence. The event was attended by 25 senior law enforcement representatives from the region, who discussed the creation of competency frameworks and training strategies in this field. A competency framework defines the requirements for roles involved in the investigation and prosecution of cybercrimes, while a training strategy sets out how to develop these skills through professional courses. The workshop marked the start of the second phase of the OSCE regional capacity-building project, which started in September 2024 and will continue in 2025 with a series of national workshops to support the countries in the region in developing their own national competence frameworks and strategies. The project was funded by Germany and the United States and focuses on improving sustainable and structured training in the region's police forces to counter cybercrime. The event was emphasised by Antti Karttunen, Head of the OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan, and Rebecca Dovergne, First Secretary of the German Embassy in Tashkent, who highlighted the importance of this regional support in filling gaps and adapting to real needs on the ground.

### [Combating Corruption: A Collective Responsibility](#)

On 11 December 2024, in Sarajevo, the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina organised a conference to mark the International Anti-Corruption Day, entitled 'The Role of Citizens in Anti-Corruption Processes'. The event brought together over 60 representatives of institutions, non-governmental organisations, academics, citizens and young people, with the aim of strengthening citizens' engagement in the fight against corruption through dialogue and education. The conference officially concluded the Mission's Anti-Corruption Tour, which involved several cities in BiH,



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promoting the active participation of citizens in anti-corruption processes. Ambassador Brian Aggeler emphasised that institutional reforms alone are not enough to bring about meaningful change, and urged citizens to actively engage in exposing corruption. During the meeting, mechanisms for reporting corruption were presented and the resources needed to effectively engage the public, the media and civil society were discussed. Mevludin Džindo, Deputy Director of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, emphasised the responsibility of institutions to create favourable conditions for the active involvement of citizens.

### [Enhancing Law Enforcement and Prosecution Collaboration in Combatting Crime](#)

On 10 December 2024, the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina organised a workshop in Banja Luka to strengthen the country's capacity to combat serious crime through the implementation of intelligence-led policing (ILP). The event brought together over 40 representatives of law enforcement agencies, prosecutors' offices, and other institutions in BiH, and concluded a series of five workshops aimed at promoting interagency cooperation. During the workshop, participants discussed how to integrate intelligence and criminal analysis into legal investigations, with the aim of improving coordination between police and prosecutors. Deputy Head of Mission Thomas Busch emphasised the importance of this dialogue to develop common strategies and apply intelligence-led policing consistently across the country. The initiative is part of a larger project, supported by Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland and Turkey, to combat security threats through the use of intelligence-led policing techniques.

### [OSCE builds online and offline resilience against violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

From 26-28 November 2024, the OSCE organised an interactive workshop in Sarajevo to strengthen community resilience against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism (VERLT). The event, organised by the OSCE Transnational Threats Department (TNTD) and the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was attended by government and civil society representatives, including key ministries and the Strong Cities Network, who shared experiences on the topic. The workshop was divided into two main sessions: the first addressed the threat of violent extremist content online, including misinformation and dangerous narratives, with a focus on the role of local communities in combating such narratives. The second half dealt with strategies for building offline resilience, with



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a focus on specific risk assessment, contingency planning and public-private partnerships. From 26 to 28 November 2024, the OSCE organised an interactive workshop in Sarajevo to strengthen local community resilience against violent extremism and Lejla Čopelj, from the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, stressed the importance of an integrated strategy combining education, technology and international cooperation to counter online and offline violence. Irfan Saeed, from TNTD, emphasised the importance of a local approach to prevent terrorism, given the local nature of radicalisation and recruitment. Selma Zeković from the OSCE Mission spoke about the need to protect public spaces from extremist attacks while maintaining a balance between security and accessibility. This workshop is part of the OSCE's Resilient Communities Project, which aims to improve coordination and responses between national and local authorities, civil society and non-governmental organisations, promoting a shared understanding of violent extremism. The event was funded by the United States.

## COUNCIL OF EUROPE

### [5th Plenary meeting of the Committee of the Parties to the Convention against the Trafficking in Human Organs](#)

The Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention against the Trafficking in Human Organs, known as Santiago de Compostela Committee, organised its 5th Plenary meeting (2-3 December) in Strasbourg. The Committee focused on two key topics: the review and discussion of the preliminary draft Summary Report of the responses received to the Country Profile Questionnaire on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs and the adoption by the Santiago de Compostela Committee of the questionnaire for the 1st monitoring round entitled *Prevention and Awareness Mechanisms to Counter Trafficking in Human Organs*

### [Commissioner for Human Rights asks the Italian Senate to amend the 'security bill' to safeguard human rights](#)

In a letter addressed to the President of the Senate of Italy and published on 20 December, Commissioner for Human Rights Michael O'Flaherty asks members of the Senate to refrain from adopting Bill 1236 on public security, unless it is substantially amended to ensure that it complies with Council of Europe human rights standards. The Commissioner recalls that the rights to freedom



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of expression and of peaceful assembly are enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. If adopted, Bill 1236 would introduce offences that are defined in vague terms, criminalising, among others, acts such as traffic disruption with one's own body and protests resorting to passive resistance in prisons and detention centres. The Commissioner expresses concern at the potential impact of the bill, creating room for the arbitrary and disproportionate application of relevant penalties and restrictions.

### [Money laundering and terrorist financing: MONEYVAL publishes progress reports on Croatia, Georgia and Monaco](#)

On 11 December 2024, MONEYVAL published progress reports on Croatia, Georgia and Monaco's anti-money laundering and terrorist financing measures, assessing their compliance with 40 Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations. Croatia made significant improvements, adopting measures that increased its compliance, achieving a compliance rating of either largely compliant with 36 FATF recommendations and partially compliant with four. Georgia, although it improved its measures against money laundering and terrorist financing, is still non-compliant with one recommendation on non-profit organisations and partially compliant with eight others. Finally, the Principality of Monaco made significant progress, being compliant or largely compliant with 39 recommendations, with only one recommendation classified as partially compliant. Croatia and Georgia will have to report on their progress within one year, while Monaco will have three years to do so.

### [Armenia: GRECO notes progress in preventing corruption among parliamentarians, judges and prosecutors; closes the compliance procedure](#)

The Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) published a new report on Armenia's compliance, highlighting progress in following up on 2015 recommendations to prevent corruption among parliamentarians and in the judiciary. Out of 18 recommendations, 12 have been satisfactorily implemented, while six remain partially implemented. The report marks the conclusion of the compliance process for Armenia in this evaluation cycle.

### [Poland improves its understanding of money laundering and terrorist financing risks and statistics](#)



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The MONEYVAL Committee published a report highlighting Poland's progress in the fight against money laundering and terrorist financing. The country has improved its level of compliance with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations on risk assessment, new technologies, regulation of financial institutions and management of statistics. Since December 2023, Poland has developed a new national risk assessment and implemented an enhanced national strategy, with increased financial, human and technical resources for the Military Police, the Financial Supervisory Authority (UKNF) and the Financial Intelligence Unit. It also closed some legislative loopholes, especially with regard to the enforcement of the enhanced due diligence obligation. In addition, the country has improved the collection and management of money laundering and terrorist financing statistics, such as those relating to suspicious activity reports, asset forfeiture and requests for judicial assistance. As a result of these improvements, Poland was reassessed from partial to full compliance for Recommendation 1 and from partial to full compliance for Recommendation 33. Poland will have to provide MONEYVAL with an update on progress by December 2025.

## [The Register of Damage for Ukraine Adopts the First Decisions on the Recording of Claims and Finalises the Adoption of Claim Forms](#)

The Register of Damages for Ukraine has started to make its first decisions on the registration of claims following the aggression of the Russian Federation. This step marks the beginning of the process of documenting damages suffered by individuals, companies and the Ukrainian state. The decisions concern 832 claims for damages to residential property, with a particular focus on Bakhmut, Donetsk oblast, and other Ukrainian localities. The claims, previously submitted to the Register of Damaged and Destroyed Property (RDDP), were checked for integrity and accuracy. Decisions are communicated via the Diia portal, the app and the online portal of government services. The beginning of this damage documentation aims to safeguard the rights of the affected people by creating a detailed dossier for future compensation mechanisms, such as a claims commission and a compensation fund. Markiyan Kliuchkovskiy, Executive Director of the Registry, emphasised that this step represents an important initiative for justice and accountability under international law. In addition, the Registry Council adopted new forms and rules for claims, including environmental damage, damage to cultural property, demining and removal of unexploded ordnance, and lack of access to education and health care. Once approved by the Conference of Participants, the forms for these categories will be available on the Diia portal.



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## [New report on search and seizure of stored computer data in 74 countries: a critical step in combatting cybercrime and obtaining electronic evidence](#)

The Committee of the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime published a report examining the implementation of Article 19 of the Budapest Convention, concerning the search and seizure of stored computer data, by 74 countries that are parties to the Convention. Search and seizure of electronic data are crucial tools in the fight against cybercrime, as they enable the collection of digital evidence needed to investigate crimes and prosecute perpetrators. However, these powers must be exercised with caution, ensuring a balance between law enforcement and the protection of individual rights, especially in complex scenarios such as the search of connected systems or the removal of harmful content. The report analyses how the 74 countries implement Article 19, which defines procedures for the search and seizure of electronic data, with the use of general powers, specific powers or a combination of both. In addition, the report includes recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the procedures, ensure legal certainty and strengthen the safeguards of Article 15 of the Budapest Convention. This two-year study, which began in 2022, emphasises the importance of monitoring compliance with the Convention to maintain its effectiveness. In 2026, the Committee will review the implementation of the recommendations, ensuring that countries continue to comply with international law in the fight against cybercrime. The report represents an important step in the evolution of global legal frameworks for cybercrime, aiming to strengthen the global commitment to cybersecurity while respecting human rights and legal safeguards.

## INTERPOL

### [Inside INTERPOL's probe into cyber-enabled human trafficking](#)

INTERPOL, in cooperation with the OSCE, launched a new operation to counter human trafficking facilitated by technology, including social media and apps. The initiative responds to a worrying flow of trafficked victims from Latin America to Europe, mainly exploited in prostitution. From 19 to 22 November 2024, police forces from several countries examined data from digital platforms, identifying 68 potential victims, 146 exploiters and 365 suspected usernames. The operation led to important discoveries, such as the case of a Brazilian woman recruiter for Ireland and the identification of Colombian women forced into prostitution in Spain. Other successes include the detection of suspicious activity via Telegram groups and the tracing of underage victims. The



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operation involved Europol, META, STOP THE TRAFFIK, the UNODC and received funding from Global Affairs Canada and the OSCE. This effort provided valuable information for future investigations and improved international cooperation in the fight against human trafficking.

## [INTERPOL welcomes adoption of UN convention against cybercrime](#)

INTERPOL welcomed the adoption of the UN Convention against Cybercrime, calling it a milestone in the fight against cyber threats. This treaty, the first legally binding UN treaty on cybercrime, is the result of five years of negotiations supported by INTERPOL and other international organizations. The convention expands the existing legal framework to address global cyber threats. INTERPOL Secretary General Valdecy Urquiza emphasised that cybercrime is growing rapidly and threatens institutions and human lives, and that only strong and synchronous international cooperation can effectively tackle it. The convention establishes a framework to tackle crimes such as illegal access to data, online sexual abuse of children and money laundering. It also promotes cooperation between countries to intercept the proceeds of crime and collect electronic evidence. In the face of record increases in cyber-attacks, INTERPOL has coordinated international operations, such as a recent one in Africa, which led to the arrest of 1,006 suspects and the dismantling of 134,089 malicious networks. The convention provides a basis for renewed international cooperation in the fight against cybercrime.

## **EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

### [M.B. v. France](#) (application no. 31913/21)

The applicant, M.B., is a Tunisian national who was born in 1988 and lives in Montreal (Canada). The case concerns a preventive measure taken against the applicant on counter-terrorism grounds. In an order of 19 November 2020 the Minister of the interior placed the applicant under an individual administrative control and monitoring order prohibiting him from travelling outside the Paris, Hauts-de-Seine, Seine-Saint-Denis and Val-de-Marne départements without prior authorisation and requiring him to report to a police station close to his home once a day, for a period of three months. Relying on Article 2 of Protocol No. 4 on freedom of movement, the applicant complains, first, of the lack of clarity and foreseeability of the legal basis for the measures imposed on him and, second, of disproportionate interference with his freedom of movement. Relying on Article 6 § 1 on the right to a fair hearing, he complains that he was never heard by the domestic courts in a public hearing and



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that their reliance on evidence in the form of “notes blanches” (short, unsigned reports produced by the intelligence services) was unfair. The Court found no violation of Article 2 of Protocol No. 4.

## **EUROPEAN COUNCIL**

### [Sudan: Council adds four individuals to EU sanctions list for threatening the peace, stability and security of the country](#)

The EU Council has approved additional restrictive measures against four individuals due to the ongoing conflict in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

On the SAF side:

- Mohamed Ali Ahmed Subir, a Lieutenant General, is sanctioned for harassment, arbitrary arrests, sexual violence, and torture.
- Salah Abdallah Mohamed Salah (Salah Gosh), former national security advisor and intelligence director, is held accountable for key SAF operations.

On the RSF side:

- Osman Mohamed Hamid, a Major General, is sanctioned for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.
- Tijani Karshom, de facto Governor of West Darfur, is responsible for recruiting militias and directing serious human rights abuses.

The sanctions include an asset freeze, a travel ban to the EU, and a prohibition on EU entities providing funds or resources to them.

These measures underscore the EU's commitment to peace, accountability, and solidarity with the Sudanese people, as well as its dedication to working with international partners for a peaceful resolution and humanitarian aid.

### [Migrant smuggling: Member States reach agreement on criminal law](#)

The Council agreed its position on an EU law on preventing and countering migrant smuggling. The objective of this proposal is to bring member states' criminal law closer together on issues such as the definition and sanctioning of migrant smuggling. The fight against migrant smuggling is a priority of the EU, and it is a crucial element in addressing irregular migration. intentionally assisting third-



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country nationals in entering, transiting, or staying in the EU for financial or material gain is considered a criminal offence.

### [Cybersecurity package: Council adopts new laws to strengthen cybersecurity capacities in the EU](#)

The Council has adopted two new laws as part of the EU cybersecurity legislative package: the Cyber Solidarity Act and a targeted amendment to the Cybersecurity Act (CSA). These measures aim to strengthen the EU's ability to detect, prepare for, and respond to cyber threats.

#### Cyber Solidarity Act

This regulation enhances European cybersecurity capabilities by establishing a Cybersecurity Alert System, a network of national and cross-border cyber hubs using AI and data analytics to detect and share cyber threat warnings;

Creating a Cybersecurity Emergency Mechanism to improve preparedness and incident response, including testing critical sectors (healthcare, transport, energy) for vulnerabilities.

Deploying an EU Cybersecurity Reserve of private-sector incident response services.

Providing technical mutual assistance.

Introducing an Incident Review Mechanism to assess the effectiveness of the regulation and its impact on the cybersecurity industry.

#### Amendment to the Cybersecurity Act (CSA)

This targeted amendment supports the creation of European certification schemes for managed security services (such as incident handling, penetration testing, and security audits). It aims to:

Improve the quality and comparability of cybersecurity services.

Promote trusted cybersecurity providers.

Prevent market fragmentation due to varying national certification schemes.

After signing by the presidents of the Council and the European Parliament, the laws will be published in the EU's official journal and will enter into force 20 days after publication.

### [Fighting terrorism: Council approves conclusions on future priorities for countering terrorism](#)

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to pose a significant threat to the EU and its member states. The Council approved the first of two sets of conclusions on strengthening joint counterterrorism



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efforts. The conclusions set strategic goals and highlight key areas where increased efforts are needed to enhance operational efficiency. The aim of the conclusions is to shape EU counterterrorism policies and measures for the next five years. In the Council conclusions, member states note that global unrest has heightened the terrorism threat level in some member states. In order to detect and prevent the infiltration of persons posing a security threat, the Council invites member states to continue inserting alerts based on return decisions in the Schengen Information System, and calls on the Commission and member states to operationalise the effective return of persons posing a security threat.

As the digital sphere has increasingly become a breeding ground for radicalisation, the Council invites the Commission to take further steps to address the challenges posed by non-compliant online platforms, by strictly enforcing the Digital Services Act.

### [Council adopts new rules to ensure safer firearms trade](#)

The Council has approved updated EU regulations on the import, export, and transit of firearms. These new rules aim to eliminate loopholes exploited for illicit firearms trafficking while streamlining legal trade and the lawful movement of firearms.

The revised regulation will strengthen the traceability of civilian firearms by standardizing procedures across the EU and enhancing coordination among national authorities. Additionally, it introduces safeguards to prevent legally produced firearms exported from the EU from being diverted to illegal markets.

To support legitimate users such as hunters, sport shooters, and exhibitors, the new framework establishes harmonized and digitalized procedures, making processes more efficient. Simultaneously, it reduces administrative burdens for manufacturers and dealers while maintaining high security standards.

## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

### [Human rights breaches in Crimea, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan](#)

The European Parliament condemns Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea and Sevastopol, marking the 11th year of annexation. MEPs highlight severe human rights violations, particularly against Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians, and other minorities. They call for the immediate and



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unconditional release of political prisoners Iryna Danylovysh, Tofik Abdulhaziiiev, and Amet Suleymanov, who represent the persecution of journalists, activists, and human rights defenders. The Parliament urges the international community to maintain its non-recognition policy of the annexation and to strengthen sanctions against those responsible. The European Parliament expresses deep concern over democratic backsliding in Kyrgyzstan, including the arbitrary detention of opposition leader Temirlan Sultanbekov. MEPs call for his immediate release, along with other detained party officials, and urge Kyrgyz authorities to respect political and civil rights as per their agreements with the EU. They demand the repeal of the “false information law” and the “Foreign Representatives” law and insist Kyrgyzstan stop aiding Russia in evading sanctions. In Azerbaijan, MEPs condemn ongoing repression of civil society, media, and dissidents, demanding the unconditional release of human rights defenders, journalists, and political activists. They highlight the case of Dr. Gubad Ibadoghlu, calling for the lifting of his travel ban and access to medical treatment abroad. MEPs also urge Azerbaijan to end restrictions on independent media and propose EU sanctions against officials responsible for human rights abuses. They stress that any EU-Azerbaijan agreements, including on energy, must be tied to respect for fundamental rights and the release of political prisoners.

## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

### [Commission opens formal proceedings against TikTok on election risks under the Digital Services Act](#)

The European Commission has opened formal proceedings against TikTok over suspected breaches of the Digital Services Act (DSA) related to election integrity, particularly concerning the Romanian presidential elections on 24 November. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen emphasized the need to protect democracies from foreign interference and stated that online platforms like TikTok must be held accountable if they fail to address such risks. The investigation will focus on TikTok's recommender systems, particularly risks linked to coordinated inauthentic manipulation and automated exploitation of the platform. Policies on political advertisements and paid-for political content, including whether TikTok adequately addressed regional and linguistic risks during elections. If confirmed, these failures would violate Articles 34(1), 34(2), and 35(1) of the DSA. The decision to launch the investigation is based on intelligence from Romanian authorities, third-party reports, TikTok's risk assessment submissions (2023–2024), and internal documents provided by TikTok.



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Ireland's Digital Services Coordinator, Coimisiún na Meán, will assist in the investigation, given TikTok's EU headquarters are in Ireland. The Commission will continue gathering evidence, conducting interviews, inspections, and analysing TikTok's algorithms. The DSA allows the Commission to impose interim measures, issue non-compliance decisions, or accept commitments from TikTok to address the concerns. The timeline for the investigation is not fixed and will depend on factors such as case complexity, TikTok's cooperation, and the rights of defence.

## **EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS (FRA)**

### [EU gender-based violence survey results presented to the Council of the EU](#)

On 2 December, FRA presented the results of the EU survey on gender-based violence at the meeting of the Council of the European Union's Fundamental Rights working party (FREMP). [This report](#) presents key results of the EU gender-based violence survey based on data from all 27 Member States. The report focuses on the overall prevalence of physical violence or threats and/or sexual violence by any perpetrator, violence perpetrated by women's intimate partners and by other people (non-partners) and women's experiences of sexual harassment at work.

## **EUROPEAN PUBLIC PROSECUTOR OFFICE**

### [Admiral 3.0 investigation: EPPO investigates €38 million VAT fraud in Greece](#)

On 4 December 2024, the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) in Athens (Greece) conducted searches at several locations as part of an investigation into a suspected VAT carousel fraud discovered during the Admiral investigation, with damage estimated at 38 million euros. This investigation was opened after a criminal vein based in Greece was revealed, following support provided in November 2022 in the context of the Admiral investigation. Based on the evidence collected so far, a union based in Greece was using partly the same organisation and infrastructure as the authors investigated under Admiral to bring about a massive VAT carousel fraud, A complex criminal scheme that exploits the EU's rules on cross-border transactions between its Member States, as they are exempt from value added tax. The investigation found that the suspects have set up a complex network of companies in Greece, Romania and other EU Member States, as well as in Serbia and other non-EU countries, dedicated to selling electronic goods on the EU market. It is understood that the suspects have used a



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fraudulent chain of defaulting traders, fictitious companies created for the sole purpose of evading VAT. Other companies that participated in the fraudulent scheme would have subsequently requested VAT refunds from national tax authorities. Based on evidence, between 2017 and 2024, products worth around 305 million euros were exchanged through the criminal system. The estimated damage to the EU and Greek budgets is at least 38 million euro over the last seven years. The offences under investigation include money laundering.

### [Germany: EPPO conducts searches at a bank as part of an investigation into €200 million VAT fraud](#)

The European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) in Berlin (Germany) conducted searches at a bank in Munich as part of an investigation into possible VAT fraud involving €200 million. Under investigation is the managing director of a company, suspected of having founded the company with the sole purpose of creating a fictitious corporate identity to process transactions through his company's bank accounts. According to the investigation, the suspect received bank transfers totalling more than €200 million from 127 different companies in Italy and Slovakia on his accounts in Germany between 2016 and 2022. The money is believed to come mainly from a VAT carousel fraud, a complex criminal scheme that exploits EU rules on cross-border transactions between its member states as being exempt from value added tax. Based on the evidence, as soon as the transfers arrived in his company accounts, the suspect was withdrawing large amounts of cash, up to several hundred thousand euros, almost every day. Evidence shows that the money was disbursed by employees of the bank and payments were authorised under relevant internal monitoring obligations, despite the large number of transactions which should have raised suspicions. In this respect, it is currently being assessed whether the bank has carried out the necessary due diligence measures under the Anti-Money-Laundering Act.

### [Huracán investigation: three more VAT fraud convictions in Germany](#)

Following a large-scale VAT fraud investigation by the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) in Cologne (Germany), code name "Huracán", three individuals have been convicted by the Düsseldorf Regional Court for organised VAT fraud and aiding tax fraud. At the end of June 2024, the indictment against the three suspects was sent to the regional court in Düsseldorf (Germany), accusing them of multimillion-dollar VAT fraud involving international trade in over 2500 cars, generating a total fraudulent turnover of over EUR 51 million and creating VAT losses of EUR 18



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million. The court handed down its judgment within less than six months of the filing of the indictment, as the defendants admitted to the offences. The court considered the three defendants based in Germany as black-market vehicle dealers, since they sold cars from Germany to car dealerships in Portugal and the Netherlands as so-called "margin cars", by offering car dealers the possibility to pay VAT only on their own margin and not on the net value of the car. To do this, they used the facilities in Germany created by the five main defendants already convicted in October 2024. One of the defendants was sentenced to four years, the other to two or three years and nine months and three years imprisonment respectively. The court ordered the confiscation of assets worth €7.4 million from the defendants as part of the sentence. In addition, 1.7 million euros of seized cash has already been successfully transferred to the State treasury. This is the second conviction in the investigation into the Huracán.

## EUROJUST

### [Four suspects arrested for illegally exporting archaeological treasures](#)

Italian authorities have disrupted a sophisticated operation that was illegally exporting precious archaeological artefacts belonging to the Italian state. The criminal group worked with expert grave robbers and thieves to excavate numerous objects. Following a complex investigation lasting over several years, Italian authorities, supported by Eurojust, dismantled the organisation and arrested four suspects. The criminal group targeted mainly Apulian and Etruscan artefacts, which were stolen from archaeological sites in central and southern Italy. Once the grave robbers had retrieved the objects, a sophisticated operation would begin. The value of the objects was determined, and fake documents were prepared to prove the apparent lawful origin of the goods. Specially equipped vehicles and professional couriers would then transport the objects. The sale of the objects was organised through a fake auction house in Belgium. The criminal group's operation was highly successful, generating huge illegal profits. At the same time, they caused significant damage to Italy's cultural heritage by selling historic evidence that is now irretrievable. To conceal their activities, the criminal group used a secret language to communicate and operated under several false identities. Investigations into the criminal group started in 2020. Due to the location of the objects across Europe and the fake auction house in Belgium, international cooperation was initiated at Eurojust. European Investigation Orders were executed in Austria, Belgium, Germany and Spain with the support of Eurojust.



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## EUROPOL

### [EUR 2.7 million seized in European operation against money laundering and cash smuggling](#)

From 12 to 24 November 2024, Europol supported the customs authorities of 23 EU Member States in a large-scale operation against money laundering and cash smuggling. The operation led to the seizure of EUR 2.7 million in cash, with the possibility of this figure increasing in the coming months. In addition to the money, valuables such as gold and jewellery were also seized, including 18 gold bars worth over EUR 1.7 million. Led by French customs and supported by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), the operation included over 500 checks and inspections at passengers, airports, ports, train stations and borders. Europol provided operational support through its European Centre for Combating Financial and Economic Crime, contributing analysts and specialists to verify and validate information. Cooperation between customs agencies was crucial in stopping illicit financial flows and dismantling criminal networks across the EU. The operation involved 23 EU countries, including Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain.

### [Europol analysis reveals how criminal networks exploit legal businesses to strengthen their grip on the economy](#)

Europol published the report *Leveraging Legitimacy: How the EU's Most Threatening Criminal Networks Abuse Legal Business Structures*, which examines how criminal networks exploit legal business structures to strengthen their power and expand their illicit activities. The survey reveals that 86% of the most dangerous criminal networks in the EU use legal businesses to disguise illegal operations, launder money and consolidate their influence. Money-intensive activities are particularly vulnerable to such abuses, as they facilitate money laundering and create conditions of unfair advantage that harm legitimate businesses. Criminal networks infiltrate or own legitimate businesses, using them to mix licit and illicit operations. Some businesses are created as fronts, while others are taken over to support long-term strategies. Although the abuse of legal companies is a global phenomenon, most exploited companies operate in the EU or neighbouring countries, with a significant presence in some 80 countries. The report highlights how criminals also exploit corruption and the legitimate positions of managers and employees to gain access and influence. Infiltrated companies often serve several criminal networks simultaneously, facilitating a wide range of serious



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crimes. These findings will guide future operational actions and preventive policies, strengthening the fight against organised crime in the EU.

### [9 drug traffickers arrested and EUR 27 million in cryptocurrencies seized](#)

Europol supported law enforcement authorities in six countries in identifying clandestine bankers involved in large-scale money laundering and drug trafficking operations. This operation, based on the results of the GORGON and WHITEWALL investigations, led to the arrest of nine suspects and the seizure of luxury goods, gold, documents, telephones, EUR 35,000 in cash and EUR 27 million in cryptocurrencies. The investigation revealed a sophisticated money laundering scheme, operated by a criminal network based in the United Arab Emirates and operating throughout the EU and beyond. These networks offered ‘crime as a service’, facilitating the transfer and laundering of illicit proceeds through cash and cryptocurrencies. Among the findings was the involvement of an Albanian network, which used cryptocurrencies to move large sums of money, an innovative method that served both the Albanian underworld and other international criminal organisations. A crucial point was the role of a British citizen arrested in 2022, identified through paper traces on seized banknotes. This suspect coordinated clandestine banking services for a network based in southern Spain, supervised by a larger organisation operating from Dubai. The information obtained was analysed in depth, mapping the criminal network and identifying its members, with the support of the Spanish Guardia Civil and Europol operational task forces. Operation WHITEWALL was a milestone in the creation of an operational task force dedicated to combating clandestine banking, while GORGON highlighted the link between financial crimes and serious crimes such as drug and arms trafficking. These operations demonstrated the importance of international collaboration and public-private partnerships, such as those with stablecoin issuers and digital asset providers. Such collaborations have enabled the integration of advanced investigative expertise, including experts in cryptocurrency and digital forensic analysis. Europol played a key role, organising operational meetings, providing analytical intelligence to partners and sending specialists to the field during actions. The cooperation model, based on structured data and international trust, proved decisive for the success of the operations, setting an example of excellence in the fight against organised crime and money laundering.

### [796 arrests in massive EU action against organised crime](#)



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EMPACT Joint Action Days Southeast Europe (JAD SEE) 2024 was a vast transnational operation against organised crime, coordinated from an operations centre in Sarajevo and involving 31,109 officers from 26 countries. With a joint approach, the operation tackled threats such as human trafficking, drug and arms trafficking, and high-risk criminal networks. The operation resulted in 796 arrests, 316 investigations launched and the seizure of 442 weapons. The initiative combined checks in the physical and virtual world, including investigations on the dark web and social platforms. 655,914 checks were carried out on persons, vehicles, postal packages and premises. Cross-border cooperation was key, involving EU countries, the Western Balkans, Moldova, Ukraine and Türkiye, as well as international organisations such as INTERPOL and Europol. Europol provided operational support with mobile experts and access to its databases. The EU4FAST project facilitated regional participation, while EMPACT provided the strategic platform to guide intelligence-led operations. This initiative demonstrates the effectiveness of a collective approach to tackling complex international crime.

### [New report: Terrorists exploiting global tensions](#)

Europol's EU TE-SAT 2024 report provides a detailed overview of terrorism in the European Union during 2023, highlighting the adaptability of threats, the use of advanced technologies and the increasing involvement of young people. During the year, 120 terrorist incidents occurred, an increase from 2022. Of these, 98 attacks were completed, while others were foiled or failed. There were 426 arrests related to terrorism in 22 Member States, with the majority relating to jihadist crimes. Jihadist terrorism posed the deadliest threat, with five completed attacks carried out by lone actors, often radicalised online. These individuals use encrypted networks to plan actions, spread propaganda and recruit new members, targeting mainly young people. The Israel-Hamas conflict of 2023 has fuelled these dynamics, generating narratives that have intensified anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim tensions, amplifying European security risks. Right-wing terrorism, although with only two foiled attacks, also poses a significant threat, given the propaganda and technological activity of its networks. The use of digital platforms, tools such as 3D printing for the manufacture of weapons, and the dissemination of extremist content online contribute to further radicalising young people. Left-wing and anarchist terrorism manifested itself in 32 attacks, mainly targeting critical infrastructures and state symbols. These episodes are often linked to socio-political movements such as anti-capitalist and environmentalist movements, highlighting a strong ideological component. Technology has taken a



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central role, with terrorist groups exploiting artificial intelligence, deepfakes and encrypted communications to strengthen propaganda and operations. The increasing ability to produce sophisticated weapons, such as 3D-printed ones, and to disseminate extremist narratives on a large scale makes threats increasingly complex to address. Europol emphasises the urgency of cross-border collaboration and the use of advanced technologies to prevent attacks and counter radicalisation, protecting communities from a constantly evolving threat.

### [Law enforcement shuts down 27 DDoS booters ahead of annual Christmas attacks](#)

Operation PowerOFF, coordinated by Europol and involving 15 countries, dismantled 27 illegal platforms known as ‘booters’ and ‘stressers’, used to launch distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks. These attacks aim to overload websites with illegal traffic, rendering them inaccessible and causing significant economic and operational damage. During the operation, three administrators in France and Germany were arrested, more than 300 users involved were identified, and more than 2,000 warning notices were sent. The closed platforms, including [zdstresser.net](#) and [orbitalstress.net](#), were used by hackers and hacktivists for various purposes, from economic sabotage to ideological motivations. The Christmas period, historically associated with a peak in attacks, saw an intensification of law enforcement actions to counter this threat. The operation exploited crypto-tracking tools, forensic analysis and international information exchange through the Joint Cybercrime Action Taskforce (J-CAT) with the support of the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3). One innovative aspect was the use of online advertising campaigns to deter potential hackers. Ads on Google and YouTube highlighted the legal and social consequences of DDoS attacks, targeting young people looking for illicit tools. In parallel, traditional methods such as warning letters and face-to-face meetings were used. The operation saw global collaboration with the participation of authorities from countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Brazil and Australia. This synergy allowed not only to disrupt criminal infrastructures but also to educate the public and prevent future attacks, emphasising a holistic and continuous approach to fighting cybercrime.

### [International operation against ‘phone phishing’ gang in Belgium and the Netherlands](#)

Europol supported Belgian and Dutch authorities in an operation against a gang of criminals specialising in ‘phone phishing’, leading to the arrest of eight suspects and the execution of 17 searches in Belgium and the Netherlands. The gang members, posing as policemen or bank staff,



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targeted mainly elderly people and robbed them of millions of euro. The stolen funds were spent on luxury goods such as watches and jewellery and on parties in exclusive clubs. The victims were located in at least ten European countries. The investigation, which started in 2022 with the support of Europol and Eurojust, intensified in 2023. Europol facilitated coordination between Member States by providing analytical support, while Eurojust organised coordination meetings to optimise cooperation between Dutch and Belgian law enforcement agencies. The authorities also issued warnings to citizens, suggesting not to trust suspicious messages from suspected banking institutions and to protect devices with up-to-date antivirus software.

### [21 boats confiscated and 13 arrested in hit against migrant smuggling across the English Channel](#)

On 4 December 2024, a joint operation coordinated by Europol and Eurojust targeted a criminal network smuggling migrants across the English Channel, involving police and judicial authorities from France and Germany. The investigation identified an Iraqi-Kurdish network illegally smuggling migrants from the Middle East and East Africa to the UK, using uncertified unsafe dinghies. Police made 13 arrests (8 in Germany, 5 in France) and seized equipment such as dinghies, engines, life jackets, as well as money, gold and electronic devices. In 2024, smuggling of migrants via small boats increased, with increasing numbers of migrants reaching the UK illegally, putting their lives at risk. The Europol Taskforce, which has been aiming to dismantle these networks since 2022, coordinated the operation, supporting the investigation with experts and facilitating the exchange of information between the various countries involved, including France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK. Eurojust ensured cross-border judicial cooperation, supporting the preparation and execution of the operation. Operations were successful in dismantling part of the network and arresting the main perpetrators, but criminal networks remain active and continue to adapt.

### [Chile and Europol sign Liaison Officer Agreement and SIENA Memorandum of Understanding](#)

In November 2024, Chile and Europol signed two significant agreements: one concerning liaison officers and a memorandum of understanding for a secure connection between Chile and the agency. These instruments implement the working agreement between the two, in force since 2021, and enable faster and more secure communication to fight organised crime and transnational threats. The SIENA Memorandum of Understanding will allow Chile to connect to over 3,000 police agencies in 70 countries, facilitating the exchange of sensitive information. The agreement on liaison officers



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allows Chile to send officers to Europol to strengthen cooperation. Both sides emphasised the importance of this collaboration to improve security and tackle global criminal challenges.

### [International operation takes down another encrypted messaging service used by criminals](#)

On 3 December 2024, authorities in France, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Lithuania and Spain deactivated MATRIX, a sophisticated encrypted messaging service used by criminals for drug trafficking, weapons and money laundering. The investigation began after MATRIX was discovered in the phone of a criminal convicted of murdering a journalist. The platform's infrastructure, consisting of more than 40 servers in different countries, was monitored for three months, intercepting more than 2.3 million messages in 33 languages. During the operation, arrests and searches were made in France, Spain, Lithuania and Germany, and the main servers were shut down. The operation was supported by Eurojust and Europol, which coordinated an operational task force (OTF) to monitor criminal activities and assist in follow-up investigations. The use of new communication tools by criminals, in response to the removal of previous services such as Sky ECC and EncroChat, has made the fight against organised crime even more complex, but demonstrates the effectiveness of law enforcement in countering advanced criminal technologies.

### **EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD AGENCY (FRONTEX)**

#### [Frontex teams up with 12 countries in Europe to crack down on smugglers](#)

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, led 12 European countries and international partners in a coordinated effort to tackle the increasingly sophisticated criminal groups involved in the smuggling of goods across European borders. This two-week initiative, called “Joint Action Day (JAD) Finestra 4,” highlighted the exceptional coordination and innovative tactics used by law enforcement to outsmart criminal smuggling networks. These groups have demonstrated remarkable flexibility, creativity, and a willingness to adapt in order to avoid detection. Enhanced border controls and increased cooperation enabled law enforcement agencies to stay ahead of the criminals by uncovering their most recent operational methods. One of the most remarkable findings was the discovery of sophisticated smuggling methods, including improvised balloons to transport illegal cigarettes into the EU. First reported by Lithuanian border guards in September 2023, the balloon method involves releasing them into the air from Belarus, carrying up to 10 000 cigarettes each.



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These balloons can soar up to 3 000 metres and travel up to 700 km, with their movements tracked via GPS. Local criminals in EU countries then retrieve the illicit cargo once the balloons land. During JAD Finestra 4, authorities intercepted 14 of these balloons. This novel smuggling technique not only evades traditional border checks but also presents a serious aviation safety risk, prompting concern from aviation and security experts. Bulgarian authorities also discovered more than 300 kg of marijuana during the Frontex-led international operation. In one case, an X-ray scan, followed by a canine search, revealed 233 kg of marijuana hidden within a specially designed double wall of a lorry trailer. Three days later, law enforcement authorities discovered 77 kg of marijuana concealed in garage door frames carried by another lorry. The collaboration of 12 nations and numerous partners reflects Frontex's commitment to not just managing borders but also ensuring that Europe remains alert and prepared against evolving threats. By combining advanced surveillance technology with real-time intelligence sharing, Frontex and its partners are setting a new benchmark in the fight against cross-border crime.

### [Frontex launch of new operational command structure in Greece and Cyprus](#)

(Alexandroupolis) 28 November, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency has achieved a significant milestone and strengthened its collaboration with Member States towards a more robust and efficient operational command framework in Greece and Cyprus. Alongside senior representatives from the Hellenic Police: Hellenic Coast Guard Lieutenant General Dimitrios Mallios, Deputy Chief Tryfon Kontizas, and Assistant Chief of the Police for Cyprus Border Protection Marios Christophides, Frontex Deputy Director for Operations, Lars Gerdes, officially launched, during a ceremonial event, the new Contingent 2 in Alexandroupolis. This Contingent, overseeing operational tasks in Greece and Cyprus under the Frontex Chain of Command, represents a new phase in Agency development. The Frontex Contingent Commander supervises all activities conducted as part of Joint Operation Greece and Joint Operation Cyprus. The Contingent is divided into four units — three in Greece and one in Cyprus — comprising 28 operational teams across land, sea, and air domains in both nations. As Frontex's Standing Corps is set to expand to 10,000 by the close of 2027, the operational focus is shifting from Warsaw to the field. This change is more than just logistical; it is a strategic transformation. The new field command structure we are launching today is crucial. It aims to bring decision-making closer to the ground, ensuring that we can respond swiftly and efficiently to any situation and to any request from the host State we are supporting. "This new field structure



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provides leadership with greater proximity to the action, clear directives, and the resources to succeed. For Greece, this means enhanced assistance during migration surges in the Aegean. For Cyprus, this ensures faster responses to any influx. And for both nations, it represents a dependable partner standing by your side,” says Lars Gerdes, Deputy Executive Director for Operations. Moreover, we are grateful that other Member States supporting Frontex, Greece, and Cyprus are present, contributing with capacity building and providing resources. This demonstrates that Europe stands united, shoulder to shoulder, and that EU external border security is a shared European challenge. The cooperation with all involved parties is exceptional and trustworthy. Frontex is active in Greece to assist local authorities with border control and migration management, including prevention, detection, and tackling cross-border crime at the EU external border with Turkey, North Macedonia, and Albania.

## [EU external borders: Irregular crossings down 40%; Western African route at record high](#)

In the first 11 months of 2024, irregular border crossings into the European Union dropped by 40%, to 220 700, according to preliminary data collected by Frontex\*. This significant decline was mainly driven by sharp drops on the Western Balkan (-80%) and the Central Mediterranean migratory routes (-60%). Meanwhile, the Western African route has already surpassed the total number of irregular arrivals in all of last year, putting the total for 2024 at the highest level since Frontex began to collect data in 2009. With more than 2 700 officers and staff deployed at the EU’s external borders, Frontex plays a vital role in assisting national authorities in managing and safeguarding Europe’s external borders.

Key highlights for the first 11 months of 2024:

- Western African route with all-time high this year
- Western Balkans route demonstrated a significant decline of 80%.
- Eastern Land Border saw increases in irregular border crossings of 200%.
- The top nationalities of irregular migrants this year are Syria, Afghanistan, and Mali.

## EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF REGIONS

### [Turkish government is undermining local democracy, EU and Turkish local leaders say](#)



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Local and regional politicians from the European Union and from Türkiye have called on the Turkish government to stop replacing elected mayors with government-appointed trustees. The European Union has repeatedly condemned the removal of many elected mayors and their replacement with government appointees in recent years. The practice was condemned the European Commission's report on Türkiye's progress on reforms, published on 30 October, which found that the government's pressure on mayors from opposition parties continued to weaken local democracy. The challenges faced by Turkish local and regional authorities was a major point of discussion in the meeting, which reviewed recent developments in Türkiye and EU-Türkiye relations. The European Commission report noted some important progress, particularly in areas related to economic and monetary policy. Areas of serious concern for the EU include respect for the rule of law, including the independence of the judiciary, and differences between Turkey and the EU on foreign and security policy. These concerns would be further aggravated if government plans to introduce a foreign-agent law and a media-freedom law were to materialise. The Working Group on Türkiye also discussed how local governments in Türkiye are trying to develop their entrepreneurial ecosystems, develop their local economics, and encourage entrepreneurship. The meeting was preceded by a visit to a case study of a local-government initiative, in the Şişli Municipality in Istanbul.

#### [EU Agri-Food Days: regions deliver their vision for the future of EU agriculture and food sector](#)

The Chair of the Commission for Natural Resources (NAT) of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), Karsten Uno PETERSEN, participated in the 2024 EU Agri-Food Days to share the key priorities and demands of regions and cities for shaping the future of agriculture and the food sector in the coming years. For Karsten Uno PETERSEN (DK/PES), regional councillor in South Denmark, the EU must end the current agricultural status quo, “which depopulates our rural areas, devalues the essential work of our farmers, fuels the geography of discontent, and destroys our planet. We need to move towards a fairer, more sustainable, and attractive way of producing our food.”

The NAT Chair highlighted the key messages of recent opinions adopted by local and regional representatives in the CoR to achieve this goal. To sustainably address the European agricultural crisis, it is crucial to reduce social inequalities by rebalancing CAP payments toward small and medium-sized farms. Ensuring fair and stable prices through effective market regulation – both internally and internationally – is vital to improve farmers' incomes and attract new generations to the sector. Attracting young farmers also requires fostering vibrant rural areas with better living



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conditions, strengthening LEADER programmes for rural development, and simplifying access to funding. The President of the NAT Commission added that “this cannot be achieved by downgrading the greening of the CAP nor by abandoning our commitments outlined in the Farm to Fork strategy. Farmers must be supported in the transition to sustainable farming, and therefore the CAP budget for greening should be supplemented with additional resources.”

Finally, he emphasized the importance of empowering European regions in shaping and implementing agricultural policies, enabling tailored interventions through the regionalization of the CAP’s second pillar.

### [Local leaders support boost to defence spending, without harming poorer area](#)

On 11 December, the Commission for Economic Policy (ECON) discussed the need for a robust Cohesion Policy and increased funding to support the EU's defence industry, particularly as the European Commission prepares its proposal for the next long-term budget beyond 2027. Key issues included fostering the proximity economy to support SMEs in regional value chains and implementing European trade policy. ECON members adopted a draft opinion calling for dedicated resources for a strong European defence industry, particularly focusing on regional innovation and defence investments, especially in regions exposed to military threats. They emphasized the importance of maintaining Cohesion Policy alongside defence funding to ensure territorial, economic, and social development, while preventing negative impacts on local authorities and regional cohesion. The meeting also highlighted the significance of proximity economies, which are regional short value chains led by local SMEs. ECON members called on the European Commission to incorporate the proximity economy into EU strategies to address challenges like supply chain issues, labour shortages, and high energy costs. They emphasized the need for policies and funding that support regional resilience, cohesion, and sustainable growth. Both opinions are set for a vote at the plenary session on 20-21 February 2025.

### [Green Deal Funding Alert - December 2024](#)

The European Committee of the Regions' Green Deal Funding Alert for December 2024 highlights new opportunities for local and regional authorities to access funding for green initiatives. The alert emphasizes the importance of EU support for climate transition projects, focusing on clean energy,



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sustainability, and innovation. It provides guidance on upcoming funding calls to assist regions in achieving their green goals and improving environmental resilience.

## **COURT OF JUSTICE OF EUROPEAN UNION**

### [Destabilisation of Moldova: the General Court upholds the restrictive measures taken against Mr Shor and Ms Tauber in respect of their role in organising violent demonstrations](#)

The General Court of the European Union has upheld the restrictive measures imposed on Ilan Mironovich Shor and Martina Tauber for their role in organizing violent anti-government demonstrations in Moldova. These measures were adopted in response to actions destabilizing Moldova, which have intensified since Russia's war against Ukraine and threaten Moldova's EU accession process. Shor, former leader of the ŞOR party, and Tauber, former deputy leader, were included in the EU's sanctions list in 2023 and remained listed in 2024 due to their involvement in activities undermining Moldova's sovereignty, democracy, rule of law, and security. They sought the annulment of these measures and financial compensation for alleged non-material harm. However, the General Court dismissed their claims, affirming that such measures fall within the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and are justified to support democracy and the rule of law in third countries.



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