



EUROJUST

European Union Agency for
Criminal Justice Cooperation

European Judicial Organised Crime Network (EJOCN)

Outcome report of the launch event

September 2024

Criminal justice across borders



1. Introduction

The fight against drug-related organised crime is a priority for the EU and its Member States. In October 2023, the European Commission presented a communication on an [EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime](#), including a proposal to set up a network of specialised prosecutors and judges to dismantle criminal networks. In January 2024, on the initiative of the Belgian Presidency of the EU, the ministers of justice from all EU Member States expressed support for this proposal.

On 14 June 2024, the Justice and Home Affairs Council approved its [conclusions](#) and established the European Judicial Organised Crime Network (EJOCN) with a broad and flexible mandate to address all judicial aspects of the fight against organised crime.

The European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust) was given a key role in the setting up and functioning of the new judicial network. On 25 and 26 September 2024, Eurojust hosted the launch of the EJOCN. The launch event gathered together prosecutors appointed by 24 EU Member States, along with Eurojust, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA), the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and the Commission. The first day of the event was dedicated to exchanges of views on the fight against drug-related organised crime. The second day focused on the set-up, functions and tasks of the EJOCN.

This report summarises the discussions, needs, expectations and possible approaches suggested by the participants at the EJOCN launch event.

2. Keynote addresses

The President of Eurojust welcomed the participants and thanked the Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies of the Council of the European Union for 'mobilising the EU engine' to step up the judicial cooperation against organised crime. Only three months after the justice ministers decided to set up the EJOCN, Eurojust organised its first meeting to explore how to better work together across borders at the level of prosecutors and ensure that the work done by the police is followed up at the judicial level.

The Deputy Minister of Justice of Hungary spoke about the security challenges posed by organised crime and the priority given by the Hungarian Presidency to jointly address criminal networks which know no boundaries. In this common effort, it is essential to overcome any barriers, build dialogue and cooperation between countries and make the best use of the EU agencies. He expressed his conviction that the EJOCN is an excellent opportunity to achieve this goal.

The Minister of Justice and the North Sea of Belgium expressed the Belgian Presidency's gratitude and satisfaction that their initiative, the EJOCN, is becoming a reality. He clarified that it is not about creating another structure, but enhancing the networking, direct contacts, trust and sharing of expertise at the judicial level, leading to a better fight against organised crime.

The European Commissioner for Justice and the European Commissioner for Home Affairs welcomed the launch of the EJOCN through video messages.

The European Commissioner for Justice underlined that no Member State can effectively tackle organised crime and drug trafficking alone. Police response is only part of the solution. It is also down to the Member States who called for the creation of a dedicated judicial network to fight organised crime. The commissioner was pleased that the first EJOCN meeting was already taking place. He referred to the different approaches and the varied definitions of organised crime in the Member States. He called for closer cooperation between Eurojust and Europol and with the EPPO.



The commissioner stated that the sharing of experiences will help prosecutors assess whether the existing tools are up to the challenge and report problems and legislative gaps that need to be closed. He recognised the need for sufficient human and financial resources for the EJOCN to be effective.

The European Commissioner for Home Affairs shared the concerning threat posed by organised crime, highlighting its infiltration into legal economies. She stated Member States must first and foremost work together, and, with the support of Eurojust, the new EJOCN is gathering public prosecutors and investigators from across the EU to efficiently fight organised crime. She concluded that Europe's safety will be in good hands with the EJOCN.

3. Judicial response to drug-related organised crime connected to Europe's seaports and other hubs

3.1. Setting the scene

Representatives from Europol, the EUDA and Eurojust presented the main trends, developments and issues identified by the agencies in the fight against drug trafficking and organised crime to stimulate discussions on judicial follow-up and judicial cooperation.

The representative of Europol, an analyst, referred to Europol's recent [report](#), which features an EU-wide analysis of how the most threatening criminal networks are organised, what their characteristics are, which criminal activities they engage in and how and where they operate. In this report, Europol mapped 821 networks that pose the highest threat to the EU's security. Out of these networks, 50 % are involved in drug trafficking. Europol offered specialised support to the EJOCN and to investigations in the Member States, including secure communication platforms, analysis and technical and forensic support.

The representative of the EUDA, a principal scientific analyst, reported that the former European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction officially became the EUDA in July 2024. The EUDA develops new models for the collection and analysis of data on drugs and related violence in the EU. The agency is ready to collaborate closely with and assist the EJOCN. One of the main aims of the EUDA is to communicate threats posed by new drugs and the new ways substances are being used. A report regarding the drug seizures in the EU is soon to be released by the EUDA and will be shared with the EJOCN.

The representative of Eurojust, the Chair of Eurojust's Anti-trafficking Team, referred to the above mentioned intelligence picture prepared by Europol as a very good tool that needs to be followed up at the judicial level in all Member States. The EJOCN could play an important role in this respect.

3.2. Panel discussion on challenges and best practice in investigations and prosecutions

The Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers at the Commission and Eurojust moderated a panel discussion on experiences and challenges encountered by the judicial authorities in combating drug trafficking in the EU.

The representative of Belgium called for the following measures.

- 1) Better exchanges of information between judicial authorities.** As the magistrate on call, she is often confronted with interactions between several authorities.



She noted that while the exchange of information between customs and police authorities happens in real time and informally, the exchange of information between judicial authorities is 'too little and too late'. She highlighted the need to determine how to exchange information between Member States by using formal legal assistance, spontaneous exchanges of information or informal exchanges. Formal requests slow the process, especially when Member States have limited resources or knowledge and give priority to their own investigations. And, unfortunately, the answers to formal requests are often negative, resulting in a loss of time and data. She called for increased capacities and training on the use of legal options and instruments. She highlighted that informal exchanges are faster and, although the request and the way it is communicated is informal, the information sought is evidence to be used in court. Furthermore, she called for increased spontaneous exchanges of information based on Article 7 of the 2000 Mutual Legal Assistance Convention or Article 26 of the Convention on Cybercrime.

- 2) **Better ways to identify the competent partners in other Member States.** She sees the EJOCN as a good initiative that could help judicial authorities. The network should facilitate direct contacts, trust and swift access to the counterparts in the Member States.
- 3) **Timely and increased use of joint investigation teams (JITs).** She mentioned that JITs are useful tools for judicial cooperation. However, sometimes JITs are initiated too late, or there is a reluctance to even open investigations or cooperation in some Member States. She called for proactive investigations, early cooperation and discussions on JITs. Last but not least, she mentioned obstacles to cooperation in light of the EU case-law on data retention. She called for solutions and room for law enforcement measures to facilitate successful investigations and prosecutions of organised crime groups (OCG).

The representative of the Netherlands, the National Prosecutor for Cocaine Trafficking, spoke about the Dutch strategy against organised crime, looking at each OCG as a business model. He stated that challenges arise from different legal systems for the sharing of information and international cooperation, but it all comes down to understanding each other and building up trust. The EJOCN is therefore a welcome addition. He called on his fellow prosecutors from the EJOCN to start working together and sharing information against OCGs.

The representative of Greece, a deputy public prosecutor, shared her experience in working on investigations of illicit drug trafficking. She presented some case examples, challenges and solutions. She highlighted best practice and tools that assist practitioners.

The representative of Portugal, a senior prosecutor, called for better ways to dismantle criminal organisations and shared the challenges faced as a prosecutor in Portugal.

The representative of Finland, a public prosecutor, spoke about those at the top of OCGs who experience challenges in finding reliable couriers who do not know anyone higher in the network. She mentioned the typical characteristics of drug-related OCGs active within Finland. She called for closer and early judicial cooperation in cases involving international OCGs. To do this, EJOCN members could act jointly to be more efficient against such groups, discuss challenges, compare differences between legal systems, share knowledge on investigation and prosecution strategies and the suitability of JITs, and ask for support from Eurojust. She presented the main challenges experienced by Finland in investigations of organised crime which included the following.

- 1) Several questions need swift answers at the international level. These include a coordinated prosecution strategy based on the location of the main evidence and which crimes and suspects should be investigated, prosecuted and arrested and by whom.



This is a challenge, as experience shows a lack of information or very limited exchanges of information between judicial authorities. Furthermore, in Finland, a prosecution order by the Prosecutor General is needed for offences committed abroad.

- 2) Sometimes countries refuse to extradite their own citizens.
- 3) There are difficulties in prosecuting money laundering in Finland when the predicate offence is committed in Finland but the money laundering takes place abroad.
- 4) There are challenges in prosecuting when drugs are seized in another Member State following a European Investigation Order.

The representatives of Denmark, special prosecutors, highlighted the best practice and challenges in the gathering of evidence, detecting links between OCGs and cooperation with other Member States.

The representative of Spain, the Chief Public Prosecutor of the Special Anti-drug Prosecutor's Office, welcomed the timely setting up of the EJOCN, calling for this new network to be more than a list of contact points. She spoke about the situation in Spain and called for a discussion in the EJOCN about the sharing of information with non-EU countries.

3.3. Workshop discussions on issues encountered in investigating and prosecuting organised crime and drug trafficking

Following the panel discussion, participants were divided into breakout groups. They identified several challenges in investigating and prosecuting organised crime and expressed possible solutions and reflections on a potential role of the EJOCN to address them.

4. Needs, functions and tasks of the EJOCN

4.1. Introduction to the topic

The Vice-President of Eurojust welcomed the establishment of the EJOCN and suggested that the network focuses not only on strategic exchanges of best practice and knowledge, but on activities and actions aimed at achieving an operational impact against organised crime. In this respect, he spoke about the possibility for EJOCN members to exchange information on open investigations that can be coordinated internationally at the judicial level. Such exchanges could, for instance, happen in closed sessions of the EJOCN, on a voluntary basis, in accordance with the national rules. Furthermore, he referred to Europol's presentation on decoding the most threatening criminal networks, which shows that a lot of knowledge on OCGs already exists. Unfortunately, this knowledge is not always optimally exchanged and passed on to the judiciary for a swift judicial follow up. He invited all participants to discuss and see the potential for this development and to also share further views and needs during small group discussions.

A representative of the Commission, a legal officer in the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, underlined the same main goal, that the EJOCN should have firstly an added operational value. She reminded the participants that the Commission is always keen to hear the views and problems of practitioners, to be aware of existing challenges. The discussions of the network should feed into the Commission's work, especially when legislative changes are needed as regards judicial cooperation tools and instruments. Ideally, the EJOCN needs to be agile and promote and support coordinated investigations and prosecution approaches. In addition, she called for enhanced collaboration between Eurojust and Europol and between law enforcement and judicial authorities, which has been frequently



discussed. She suggested the involvement of Europol, the EPPO and the EUDA in the activities of the EJOCN, where appropriate, for combining efforts, building trust and understanding the real added value of the other organisations.

Another representative of the Commission, a head of unit in the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, spoke about the [EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime](#) issued in October 2023 by the Commission. The roadmap called for stepping up the EU's targeted response in these areas, and, as one of the priority initiatives, establishing a dedicated network of prosecutors. The Commission envisaged a flexible judicial network that could be adapted to the needs of practitioners and the threats from OCGs, to enhance the fight against criminal networks. Ideally, from the Commission's perspective, the EJOCN would move away from the commodity-based approach and focus on the OCGs in general, both at the strategic level, but also – very importantly – at the operational level. The EJOCN could lay the groundwork for operational work, by helping, for example, to trigger more investigations and JITs. He invited the EJOCN members to make the network as useful as possible for an operational impact and to find the best ways to do it, whether through bilateral meetings, the exchange of information on cases or through other ways. The Commission is available to listen to the needs of the EJOCN and translate them into practice.

The representative of the EPPO, Counsellor to the European Chief Prosecutor for operational matters, mentioned that while not seeking to extend its competences to fight organised crime, the EPPO exercises its competence if the focus of the criminal activity of the OCGs is crimes against the financial interests of the EU. For this reason, the EPPO can be a valuable addition to the EJOCN, being able to share its knowledge and experience, notably in terms of the new trends in the activity of OCGs. She highlighted the added value of the EPPO and reminded that exchanges of information between the 24 Member States happen swiftly, without European Investigation Orders. She underlined the importance of trust and of sharing new trends. The EPPO is willing to be a member of the network and points out that most EPPO delegated prosecutors are experienced in fighting organised crime and can contribute to the joint efforts of the EJOCN.

4.2. Workshop discussions on needs, functions and tasks of the EJOCN

Participants discussed in break-out groups how to shape and build up the judicial network against organised crime. In particular, participants exchanged preliminary views on the scope, vision and ambitions of the EJOCN, its composition and functioning and the support needed from Eurojust.

- **Possible role for the EJOCN.**

Participants highlighted that the EJOCN must constitute an additional help for practitioners:

- to exchange and increase knowledge about challenges and best practice in dealing with issues such as organised crime, different judicial systems, legislation, approaches, case-law, etc., and, if needed, the EJOCN could establish working groups on these topics;
- to assist in providing immediate counterparts and contacts in each Member State for exchanges of information, triggering parallel investigations and cooperation;
- to act as a bridge for operational work and promote Eurojust and JITs as very useful tools that should be initiated at an early stage;
- to provide input and recommendations to policymakers and legislators on issues identified by the network;
- to execute any other tasks identified by the network as necessary, which will be reflected in the EJOCN agenda for the next two years.



- **Possible partners.**

As a first phase, the participants identified the following partners for the EJOCN that could be contacted or invited to EJOCN meetings on an ad hoc basis for specific tasks and needs: the Commission, the EPPA, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Europol, the EUDA, the Network of National Experts on Joint Investigation Teams, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and non-EU countries. Some participants suggested collaborating with the [liaison prosecutors seconded at Eurojust](#) with a view to establishing cooperation with the respective countries they represent.

- **Need for permanent EJOCN members.**

The participants see the EJOCN as an important and positive development from both a strategic and an operational perspective. They consider a stable and fixed composition essential, and trust and continuity as also important. The EJOCN should develop into a strong network with permanent members who know one another, build up trust and cooperate closely. For this to happen, the participants called on each Member State to designate one single point of contact as a permanent EJOCN member, preferably a prosecutor, to further organise networking at the national level. Member States could appoint additional representatives to join the EJOCN permanently, or only attend specific EJOCN meetings or activities, depending on the topic. Eurojust was asked to compile, update and share the list of contact points with all members of the EJOCN. The contact list aims to facilitate direct communication.

- **Regular meetings.**

The participants suggested that the EJOCN should meet twice a year, in plenary sessions, convened by the Presidency of the Council of the EU at Eurojust's premises in The Hague. The EJOCN might organise additional topical or regional meetings, whenever needed, on legal and judicial topics to share best practices, trends, recommendations and ideas. Smaller meetings could be organised with Member States that experience similar problems.

- **Chair of the EJOCN.**

The participants suggested that the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU organise and chair the EJOCN's meetings and activities, with assistance from Eurojust's support structure.

- **Support from Eurojust.**

The participants highlighted the importance of establishing a support structure at Eurojust as a matter of priority with appropriate human and financial resources. This structure will ensure qualified support for the network and synergies with the work of the other judicial networks, focus groups and Eurojust's structures and national desks.

5. Final remarks

The Vice-President of Eurojust wrapped up the discussions and announced the next steps. He recognised, on the one hand, the valuable input received today from all participants and, on the other hand, the challenges ahead to implementing all the good ideas. Eurojust will elaborate on all input received and prepare a first-draft work plan for the EJOCN for 2025–2026, to be approved at the next meeting of the EJOCN. The network does not have complete clarity or a common position with regard to all the issues raised, but the discussions will continue.

The next meeting will take place in March 2025 at Eurojust and will be chaired by the Polish Presidency with support from Eurojust. The exact dates and agenda of the next meeting will be announced in due time.



Eurojust, Johan de Wittlaan 9, 2517 JR The Hague, The Netherlands
www.eurojust.europa.eu • info@eurojust.europa.eu • +31 70 412 5000
Follow Eurojust on X, LinkedIn and YouTube @Eurojust

Catalogue number: QP-01-24-012-EN-N • ISBN: 978-92-9404-384-9 • DOI: 10.2812/1251450



Eurojust is an agency of the European Union