

Joint press release of the European Commission and Europol (18 February 2003)

Caption: Article 36 of the Treaty on European Union stipulates that the Commission shall be fully associated with the work in the areas of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters. Accordingly, on 18 February 2003, the European Commission signs a cooperation agreement with the European Police Office (Europol).

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A co-operation agreement between Commission and Europol - Joint Press Release of the European Commission and Europol

The European Commissioner responsible for Justice and Home Affairs, Antonio Vitorino, and the Director of Europol, Jürgen Storbeck, have signed today at the European Parliament a co-operation agreement between the European Commission and the European Police Office.

"The Commission and Europol" declared Antonio Vitorino, "have been working together for quite some time: but the increasing links between the Commission and Europol and the strict legal framework of the Europol Convention and its implementing regulations make it necessary to formalise this co-operation."

"The agreement enables the European Union to respond better than before to the challenges of international and organised crime. The Commission and Europol have to deal with different perspectives in preventing and combating serious forms of international crime. Whereas the Commission is focussing more on political, strategic and legal matters, Europol concentrates its efforts on the direct support to investigations and operations of Member States law enforcement agencies." stated Europol's Director Jürgen Storbeck, who added, "Europol and The Commission are now in a better position, to provide mutual assistance and to combine their expertise, methods and resources in a wide number of common interests".

The Treaty of the European Union mentions (art. 29 and 30) Europol as an important instrument of the Union's efforts to prevent and fight against organised crime in order to achieve the objective of providing its citizens with a high level of safety within an area of freedom, security and justice. The Amsterdam Treaty stipulates (art. 36) that the Commission shall be fully associated with the work in the areas referred to in Title VI : police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters. The Europol Convention stipulates (art. 28/4) that the Commission shall be invited to attend meetings of the Management Board with non-voting status. The Commission also attends, since July 1999, the meetings of the Heads of National Units of Europol as well as various expert groups.

For the Commission to be able to participate effectively in the decision making in the Union regarding organised crime, it is essential that it disposes of all relevant information, including information from Europol. Since the internal regulations of Europol foresee specific conditions for the transmission of confidential information to other organisations (including EU-related bodies) or third countries, a special agreement was necessary. The co-operation agreement signed today, negotiated by the Europol directorate and the Commission services, will allow only the exchange of strategic information, like situation reports and threat assessments, while does not include the exchange of personal data. It consists of two parts. The first one describes the general framework for co-operation while the second part is an Annex, which specifies the co-operation regarding the protection of the Euro against counterfeiting.

The Directorate General of JAI shall act as the "contact point" of the Commission. In specific areas of co-operation which fall under the responsibility of Commission services other than JAI, direct contact between Europol and these services shall be possible. This regards especially the direct cooperation between Europol and the European Antifraud Office (OLAF) in the fight against the counterfeiting of the euro, but also against fraud, corruption and money laundering which affect the Communities' financial interests.