

Report from the meeting of the JPSG March 2023

The 12th meeting of the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group on Europol (JPSG Europol) was held at the Riksdag on 26–27 March. The meeting was hosted by the Riksdag and co-chaired by the European Parliament. Some seventy members of parliament participated in the meeting.

The meeting opened with an address by European Commissioner Ylva Johansson. This was followed by an account of Europol's activities between October 2022 and March 2023 and a report from the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS). After this, Sweden's Minister for Justice Gunnar Strömmer (Moderate Party) delivered a speech and there were two thematic debates about Europol's operational support to member states with a special focus on the concept of High-Value Targets/Operational Task Forces (HVT/OTF) and on the fight against trafficking in human beings.

The report contains summaries of the main messages of the various sessions.

Further information and video recordings of the conference are available on the website for the parliamentary dimension of the Presidency [here](#).

Keynote intervention by Commissioner Ylva Johansson

The Commissioner opened by noting that Sweden is one of the member states that has been hit the hardest by organised crime and that organised crime poses a serious threat to our societies throughout the EU. She underlined that today's organised criminal groups are becoming increasingly sophisticated and international. She continued by highlighting the recently updated regulation for Europol which, among other things, gives Europol the opportunity to handle large volumes of data, which is of decisive importance. She further underlined that the Commission is stepping up the fight against drug trafficking, and she brought attention to the proposal to combat sexual abuse of children online. The proposal is currently in an important negotiation phase. She defended the proposal and stated that the Internet has had a serious, negative impact on the situation of children who are the victims of sexual violence. Next year, the temporary legislation that has made it possible for companies to detect abuse in online messaging services will expire. If this legislation is not renewed, it will mean that it will only be possible to search for malicious software - malware - in messaging services, but not for violations of children. If we lose this opportunity, the EU will in practice become a safe haven for paedophiles online, she argued. The proposal is about this, she said; it is not about the Internet companies being

given the right to read their users' messages. EU regulations already provide the strongest protection of online privacy in the world, she stressed, and she concluded by pointing out that many survivors' organisations support the Commission's proposal.

Her speech was followed by a debate with the members present.

Europol's activities in October 2022 – March 2023

The next item on the agenda was a presentation by Executive Director of Europol Catherine De Bolle of Europol's activities in October 2022 – March 2023. Ms De Bolle opened her speech by noting that a world characterised by rapid change has necessitated a review the direction of Europol's activities. High-value targets, improved opportunities to keep up with technological developments, strengthened cooperation with third countries and innovation support for advanced forms of data analysis were mentioned as areas of focus. Work is also continuing with the implementation of the new Europol regulation. She also described the work with data supervision that the new regulation has involved, as well as Europol's external cooperation, where she focused on increased cooperation with Ukraine and how the security risks that the war entails are being dealt with. She further emphasised that progress has been made in the fight against drug trafficking. Ms De Bolle also mentioned the fight against trafficking in human beings, and noted an increasing use of violence. She furthermore mentioned corruption, terrorism, cyber crime and sexual abuse of children online.

The floor was then given to Jérôme Bonet, Chairperson of the Europol Management Board. He presented the work of the Board in the last six months. The Board has primarily looked at political and legislative developments and, in particular, at how interoperability within Europe can be strengthened. In addition, he mentioned data supervision matters.

After the presentations, members were given the opportunity to put questions to Ms De Bolle and Mr Bonet.

Report from the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS)

The next session was a report from the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS), Wojciech Wiewiórowski. He presented the EDPS' work vis-à-vis Europol since the last meeting and focused, among other things, on the Perci project in which member states can request that illegal content be removed by Internet companies, and explained that the EDPS has changed its work procedures for its audit of Europol's work. He also described the changes for EDPS as a result of the new Europol regulation. After the presentation, Europol's Deputy Executive Director Jürgen Ebner was given the opportunity to comment

on the report. The floor was then opened to the members for questions to the EDPS.

Speech by Minister for Justice Gunnar Strömmer (Moderate Party)

In his speech, the Minister for Justice described the priorities of the Swedish Presidency during the spring of 2023 in the field of security. He noted that security is an overall priority for the Presidency, in particular support to Ukraine. The fight against organised crime is high on the agenda, and he noted that Europol has stated that organised crime has never before posed as great a threat as it does today. It is primarily driven by economic incentives, he noted, and he therefore hoped that the negotiations, inter alia, on forfeiture legislation, will soon be concluded. He took up the importance of access to communication information online and expressed his regret that the debate has often made it sound as though a choice needs to be made between privacy and security. Both are important. He stressed that new rules on passenger information and external border controls are a matter of urgency. Mr Strömmer also described the fight against terrorism as a priority matter.

Europol's operational support to member states with a special focus on the concept of High-Value Targets/Operational Task Forces (HVT/OTF)

The thematic debate was introduced with a presentation by two representatives of the Police, Johan Sone and Linda Staaf. They underlined Europol's importance in the fight against organised crime, and the value of its support in large and complex cases. This applies, for example, to work with high-value targets. Access to encrypted messages in the Encrochat and SkyECC cases have been of enormous importance. It has been possible to imprison a whole generation of high-level criminal actors because of this. A general description was given of how this work was conducted in Sweden and of cooperation with Europol. Better opportunities for additional, short-term resources for Europol were also requested.

Their presentation was followed by a speech by Deputy Executive Director of Europol, Jean-Philippe Lecouffe, on the same theme. He started by noting that serious changes have been noted recently among organised criminals in the form of an increased use of violence, greater flexibility and increased internationalisation. Focusing the work on high-value targets and using operational task forces are the most resource-efficient ways of combatting this, he said. Operational task forces are a working method where Europol and the

national agencies jointly identify high-value targets. Mr Lecouffe described the methodology of their work and noted that it has been successful.

After the presentations, the floor was opened for questions from the members.

The fight against trafficking in human beings

The last thematic debate was opened with a speech from Diane Schmitt, the EU's Anti-Trafficking Coordinator. She noted that trafficking in human beings affects people from third countries and EU citizens. The majority of victims are women and girls, one in four are children, and trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes is most common. She expressed her regret over the fact that it is difficult to bring perpetrators to justice. She stressed that a multifaceted approach including preventive measures, cooperation with third countries and online initiatives needs to be used in the fight against trafficking in human beings.

The floor was then passed once again to Jean-Philippe Lecouffe, who presented Europol's perspective on the matter. He stressed that it is a complex problem where exploitation of the victims can take different forms. It is a highly lucrative, and very serious crime that often affects the weakest in society. Many of the victims are EU citizens, he pointed out. A large part of the crime chain takes place online, and many of the victims also become involved and end up assisting the perpetrators in various ways. Europol has, among other things, established a special centre to support the member states in their work to fight trafficking in human beings. Mr Lecouffe underlined that the growing use of the Internet in the crime chain is becoming an ever-greater challenge. Increased international cooperation and coordination with economic crime investigations is also desirable, he stated.

Finally, the floor was given to Ms Petra Bakker, EU Police Commissioner for the Netherlands and national EMPACT coordinator. She explained that EMPACT is a multi-disciplinary platform for coordination of different actors in the EU regarding, among other things, trafficking in human beings. She gave a general presentation of EMPACT's priorities in the field of crime. The Netherlands leads the work in EMPACT against trafficking in human beings. She stressed that EMPACT cooperates with third countries and gave an overview of the ten strategic goals the organisation has set.

An exchange of opinions then followed among the members who were present.