



PRESS RELEASE

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New CER working paper

THE EU AND THE FIGHT AGAINST ORGANISED CRIME

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The EU needs to tackle a new threat: international organised crime. Europe's criminal underworld is taking advantage of new opportunities to commit crime that come with the increasing mobility of people, goods and services across national boundaries. Cheap internet access, mobile phones and budget air travel allows criminals to commit old crimes, like theft or fraud, in new ways and in relative anonymity. Each year, for example, over 100,000 women and children are trafficked across EU borders. Illegal factories in Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands and the Baltic states dominate the world market in illegal amphetamines and the 'ecstasy' drug. And the ability of organised gangs to launder their profits through Europe's financial sectors is remarkable.

European governments and their police forces have no choice but to work together if they are to beat these increasingly sophisticated criminal networks. While criminals can move easily between EU countries, national policemen cannot. Gangs can commit offences in one country while shielding their leadership and finances abroad. Hence European countries are sharing criminal intelligence through Europol, the EU police office; co-ordinating prosecutions through Eurojust, its unit of prosecutors; and agreeing new legislation to make Europe a far less friendly environment for cross-border crime.

But it is difficult for governments to collaborate as effectively as the criminals often do. Policing and crime matters go to the core of national security and sovereignty concerns. This makes it difficult for governments to agree new EU laws that could aid crime-fighting efforts. Europol, though potentially very useful, needs reform of its working practices before it can become properly effective. And EU countries are struggling to live up to an ambitious commitment to free up information-sharing between their police forces by 2008.

A new CER working paper, 'The EU and the fight against organised crime' asks whether European police forces are doing enough to break up organised criminal networks. The paper examines the difficulties police and prosecutors encounter when working together on cross-border investigations and recommends how co-operation can be improved. It also argues that foreign policy has a key role to play: governments can stop crime from reaching the EU by working with the right countries and international organisations on crime prevention.

Notes for editors:

1. 'The EU and the fight against organised crime' will be launched in Brussels on April 26th with Otto Schily, former German interior minister, and a distinguished panel of policing experts.
2. For media enquiries, please contact the author on either +44 20 7233 1199 or hugo@cer.org.uk.
3. This paper can be ordered from the CER website (www.cer.org.uk) or by contacting Kate Meakins at kate@cer.org.uk or on +44 20 7233 1199.

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