

# Spain dismantles top Russian-speaking organised crime network that had infiltrated public institutions



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The large-scale criminal organisation was involved in criminal activities across the globe and laundering the assets in Spain

On 14 December, Europol supported the Spanish National Police (Policía Nacional) to take down a large Russian-speaking high-risk organised crime network involved in corruption and money laundering in Spain. The large-scale criminal network, implicated in a number of other criminal activities including murder, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, trafficking of human beings and extortion was active across Europe, South America and the United States. Given the high hierarchical position of those investigated, this operation, which began in 2013, is the largest against the Russian-speaking top-level organised crime in Spain in the past 10 years.

The large-scale criminal network managed to infiltrate various Spanish public institutions. One of the main targets was able to carry out philanthropic activities in these public institutions, which allowed the criminal group to penetrate the administration. This enabled the network to carry out their business with impunity, overcome legal obstacles and receive a series of administrative favours including protection from police and judicial investigations and facilitation of the acquisition of Spanish residence for the clients of the criminal organisation. Among those 'investing' in the group's activities were eastern European criminals of the highest authority in the underworld – known as 'thieves-in-law.' Lawyers, officials, politicians, businesspeople and hackers were connected to the network, increasing their operational capabilities.

The investigation uncovered how the criminal leaders

contacted the investigated individuals to carry out money laundering operations. These activities included various investment projects such as land acquisition to develop luxury real estate projects, and purchasing restaurants, industrial warehouses, plots and boats. To launder the foreign assets the group used a network of bogus companies established in different countries, including South America. The criminals used advanced technologies, such as cryptocurrencies. They were planning to purchase one of the main nightclubs on the island of Ibiza and to take over the nightlife and catering sector, both on the Levantine coast and in the Balearic Islands. This is a clear indication that this dangerous Russian-speaking organised crime network was planning to control key sectors of the Spanish economy, such as the tourism sector, and to infiltrate state institutions.

Europol supported the investigation since its very beginning as a high priority case. Europol facilitated the information exchange and provided analytical support. During the action day, Europol deployed experts on the spot to cross-check operational information in real-time against Europol's databases and to provide technical support with digital forensic capabilities.

Due to the increased threat posed by the high-risk organised crime groups, Europol is strengthening its activity by delivering agile operational support to the EU Member States or third operational parties, building the strong operational coalitions to tackle top-level organised crime actors.

Headquartered in The Hague, the Netherlands, we support the 27 EU Member States in their fight against terrorism, cybercrime and other serious and organised forms of crime. We also work with many non-EU partner states and international organisations. From its various threat assessments to its intelligence-gathering and operational activities, Europol has the tools and resources it needs to do its part in making Europe safer.

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