

The Role of Europol in International Interdisciplinary European Cooperation

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Abstract¹

Europol's mission is to support the EU Member States and Europol's partners in their fight against terrorism, cybercrime and other serious and organised forms of crime. To accomplish this goal it is crucial to collaborate with many non-EU partner states, international organisations, academia and private entities. This article illustrates Europol's cooperation with academia and other non-law enforcement partners and the benefits of this cooperation for Europol in its efforts to work more effectively and make innovation a key part of the agency's business model. First, the introduction presents an overview of Europol's activities and services. Following this, Europol cooperation with academia, interdisciplinary entities and the private sector is assessed. Finally, challenges are evaluated before the conclusion.

Keywords: *Europol, law enforcement, academia, cooperation, criminal policy*

¹ The article is based on the plenary keynote delivered by the Executive Director of Europol at the 19th Annual Conference of the European Society of Criminology, held in Ghent, Belgium, on 21 September 2019.



1. Introduction: About Europol

Europol's mission is to contribute to making Europe safer by supporting EU law enforcement in their fight against terrorism, cybercrime and other forms serious and organised crime. As the EU agency for law enforcement cooperation, Europol collects information from ongoing investigations from EU Member States and non-EU countries, to make connections and find relevant links to provide actionable intelligence and leads in return. As a criminal information hub, it connects EU Member States with its operational partners like Canada, Colombia, and the US, which has liaison officers at Europol from 13 federal agencies including the FBI, US Secret Service and Customs and Border Protection².

Europol has approximately 1 000 staff members and in addition, its headquarters hosts a community of 240 liaison officers from EU Member States and over 50 partner countries³. This environment offers law enforcement a unique networking platform, which facilitates day-to-day communication leading to shorter reaction times, closer cooperation,

² Regulation (EU) 2016/794 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and replacing and repealing Council Decisions 2009/371/JHA, 2009/934/JHA, 2009/935/JHA, 2009/936/JHA and 2009/968/JHA.

³ Europol statistics and data, accessible at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/about-europol/statistics-data>.

sharing of knowledge and immediate support in investigations. Moreover, Europol provides the EU and non-EU law enforcement community with a secure and swift communication system, the Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA)⁴, which enables the exchange of operational and strategic information between over 14 000 law enforcement entities and Europol. The agency also has a toolbox of innovative tools and techniques to complement national capabilities such as facial recognition, automated entity extraction, automated translation of cyber slang using machine learning, malware analysis system and many more.

During my first months as Executive Director, I made it my personal mission to discuss the future work of Europol with police chiefs in all EU Member States. Talking to each of them was valuable in understanding how best we, as Europol, can support police across Europe. This was mirrored in the new strategy for Europol to develop the agency further, which was presented last year. Europol's Strategy 2020+ provides the framework for Europol's work and level of ambition to address evolving security threats in an effective and efficient manner.⁵ Thus, in short, the work of the organisation focuses, in addition to its operational work, on delivering the most important services to law enforcement and to develop policing solutions for the future. Another priority is to establish Europol as a hub for innovation bringing together law enforcement, the private sector and academia, to facilitate the development of innovative solutions tailored to the needs of law enforcement authorities. Europol has a strong culture of innovation and it is currently working on complementing national capabilities and reducing the need for investments at national level by developing a highly specialised, state-of-the-art decryption platform, forensic services, and facial recognition tools based on artificial intelligence, among others. Europol will continue to invest in innovation to support EU law enforcement and help find solutions in an evolving security landscape, as it is important for the future security of all citizens.

In addition to delivering operational and strategic support to Member States, Europol's role in shaping criminal policy on a European level has also expanded considerably in recent years. By delivering input to the EU Policy Cycle against Serious International and

4 Europol, Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA) (10/08/2012).

5 Europol Strategy 2020+ (13/12/2018), accessible at https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/europol_strategy_2020.pdf.

Organised Crime⁶, Schengen Evaluations⁷, the Internal Security Strategy⁸ and many other policy devices, Europol shapes policy-makers' understanding of the security threats facing the EU. Europol has a unique role in the setting of crime priorities on a European level implementing a true intelligence-led approach to operational work and policy setting. This also extends to providing a law enforcement perspective on topics that are not immediately within the realm of its mandate, but nonetheless have a significant impact on the ability of law enforcement authorities in the EU to fight crime and terrorism. One such example is Europol's involvement in the discussions around the implementation of 5G technology, which entails some serious consequences for cross-border investigations. These consequences need to be recognised by policy-makers to allow them to make fully informed decisions. In the case of 5G, Europol provided an in-depth policy paper to highlight some of the issues for law enforcement. Law enforcement joined this discussion at a later phase and efforts need to be devoted to get involved in these deliberations at an earlier stage.

Europol continues to work on its ability to communicate with law and policy-makers to ensure the voice of law enforcement is heard at the European level. It is vital that Europol not only relies on the intelligence delivered by the Member States, but also incorporates academic insights into this work to assist in developing effective actions in the fight against some of the most threatening criminal phenomena.

2. Cooperation with academia

Law enforcement can derive immense value from academic research to deliver better and smarter policing services for citizens.

Over the years, Europol has continually expanded its cooperation with academic partners by participating in research consortia and bringing academics into the headquarters for conferences and meetings. Moreover, academic researchers provide invaluable input to the agency's work through their membership in academic advisory groups hosted at Europol's headquarters. These help to strengthen practical cooperation between law en-

6 The EU policy cycle to tackle organised and serious international crime (2018), accessible at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/37340/20185274_qc0418775enn_pdf.pdf.

7 Council Regulation (EU) No 1053/2013 (07/10/2013) establishing an evaluation and monitoring mechanism to verify the application of the Schengen acquis and repealing the Decision of the Executive Committee of 16 September 1998 setting up a Standing Committee on the evaluation and implementation of Schengen, accessible at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5123bf5f-46bc-11e3-ae03-01aa75ed71a1>.

8 Council Document (EU) No 9798/15 (10/06/2015) Draft Council Conclusions on the Renewed European Union Internal Security Strategy 2015-2020, accessible at <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9798-2015-INIT/en/>.

forcement and key domains, such as internet security, telecommunications and financial services.

Their contributions have also been very valuable in developing and implementing the methodologies for some of Europol's flagship products such as the Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment, (SOCTA)⁹, which updates Europe's law enforcement community and decision-makers on developments in serious and organised crime and the threats it poses to the EU. Similarly, the Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA)¹⁰, Europol's strategic report on key findings and emerging threats and developments in cybercrime, draws on contributions from partners in academia.

Europol is committed to further developing these forms of collaboration and bringing academic research even closer to its work. Making innovation an integral part of the business model is one of the key elements that will drive Europol forward – and academic expertise and research insights are indispensable ingredients of that strategy.

3. Interdisciplinary cooperation at Europol

Just as academia has increasingly moved towards a stronger focus on interdisciplinary research, in the same way, law enforcement has increasingly recognised the value of working in an interdisciplinary way.

Europol no longer only works with police authorities – it is at the heart of a network that connects all types of law enforcement authorities including customs and border guards, judicial bodies, financial and tax authorities, environmental and consumer protection agencies, cyber security bodies and many more.

Some of Europol's strongest cooperation partners among EU agencies such as the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drugs Addiction (EMCDDA) in Lisbon or the EU Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) in Alicante are not directly related to law enforcement and have a much stronger focus on research or technological innovation respectively. Pooling their respective expertise has proven to be very valuable and allows Europol to create new insights into criminological phenomena.

9 Europol, Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA), accessible at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/serious-and-organised-crime-threat-assessment#fndtn-tabs-0-bottom-2>.

10 Europol, Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment 2019 (IOCTA), accessible at https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/iocta_2019.pdf.

4. Cooperation with the private sector

Likewise, cooperation with the private sector is increasingly becoming a requirement if we are to effectively tackle some of the most serious types of crime and terrorism.

Europol cooperates closely with the private sector via various consultative fora. This includes fighting financial crime and money laundering in cooperation with the financial services industry in the framework of European Financial Intelligence Public Private Partnership (EFIPP). This partnership is crucial in identifying new tools and methods to enhance Europol's response to financial crime, which results in losses of billions of euros each year. Cooperation with the private sector will also be a key pillar for the new European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC) to be inaugurated at Europol in 2020 and which will provide support and coordination for Member States in the fight against financial and economic crimes. In addition, the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3)¹¹ at Europol has been at the forefront of establishing practical and effective collaboration with private industry. Similarly, Europol's Internet Referral Unit (IRU)¹² works closely with social media companies to remove terrorism-related content from their platforms.

Europol has gone to great lengths to develop these partnerships and embedding them in a strong framework that balances data protection, fundamental rights and the need to ensure the safety and security of European citizens. The private sector is undoubtedly a motor of innovation and Europol can only gain from tapping into the dynamic developments in various industries.

5. Challenges

Of course, working in an interdisciplinary way and across industries does not come without challenges.

Exchanging information with private partners and law enforcement partners outside the EU is still not as frictionless as the exchange of data with Member States. Europol needs to engage with these partners to align expectations as to what is possible and to ensure its strict data protection regime is respected in all instances. The agency continues to work on streamlining its cooperation framework and on ensuring transparency in its

11 EC3 Partners, available at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/about-europol/european-cybercrime-centre-ec3/ec3-partners>

12 EU Law Enforcement Joins Together With Facebook Against Online Terrorist Propaganda, press release (12/01/2019), accessible at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/eu-law-enforcement-joins-together-facebook-against-online-terrorist-propaganda>

exchanges with these partners. Ultimately, Europol has to be accountable to Member States, European lawmakers and the public.

There are also significant technological challenges that face Europol as the law enforcement agency of the EU. Technology fundamentally shapes security challenges and responses in the EU. Law enforcement must engage in foresight activities to understand emerging challenges, formulate innovative countermeasures and, where necessary, challenge established business models and embrace organisational change to keep pace with technological developments. Indeed, disruption through technological progress occurs as a result of the convergence of new technologies becoming available, challenges to existing legal and regulatory frameworks and the emergence of previously unseen use cases and applications for this technology. Disruption through new technologies presents both challenges and opportunities for law enforcement authorities through the emergence of new or significantly altered criminal activities as well as through the potential exploitation of these technologies by law enforcement authorities. Some of the disruptive emerging technologies with an impact on law enforcement and crime include Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum computing, 5G, alternative decentralised networks and cryptocurrencies, 3D printing and biotech.

Europol is an ideal platform to enable deeper cooperation at home in the EU and wider cooperation with partners outside the EU. In fact, Europol can deliver additional value in an age of rapid technological development by increasingly engaging in expertise coordination and collective resource management, which avoids unnecessary duplication of resources and expertise at national level.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, as demonstrated, there are many instances where Europol's work benefits from cooperation with the academic world and other non-law enforcement partners. In particular, Europol can benefit greatly from academic research and can also contribute to research efforts with its up-to-date insights into the developments of serious and organised crime, cybercrime and terrorism. Certainly, working in an interdisciplinary way and across industries does not come without challenges; for instance, information exchange with third parties needs to be improved and facilitated. Additionally, rapid technological development can generate disruptions, which would need to be addressed. However, such developments also provide opportunities, which could and need to be harnessed. In this context, cooperation with non-law enforcement partners is to be upheld and improved further. Europol is committed to deepening and intensifying this cooperation.

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