

Stroke of Luck: a closer look



Organised theft

In November 2014, German investigators from PPO Essen asked Eurojust for support in an investigation of large-scale theft of motor vehicles and valuable car parts, such as navigation systems and airbags, by an organised crime group (OCG), composed mainly of Lithuanian nationals, with links to several cities in Lithuania. Six smaller OCGs, acting independently, were involved in the criminal acts. These OCGs worked together for the purpose of transporting the goods to Lithuania. To commit thefts of and from motor vehicles, Lithuanian youngsters between the ages of 16 and 19 were brought to Germany. These youngsters were also suspected of committing other burglaries and robberies. The stolen goods were then shipped through Poland to be sold in Lithuania. In September 2015, they were caught in the act by the police and preliminarily arrested. The estimated damages amounted to EUR 7.5 million.

Cross-border cooperation

To dismantle the OCGs, cooperation between the Lithuanian and German law enforcement agencies was essential. Eurojust organised the first coordination meeting in December 2014, which laid the foundation for intensive cooperation between the German and Lithuanian PPOs and their respective police forces. Through Letters of Request exchanged via Eurojust, the investigations were progressing swiftly. A second coordination meeting was held in July 2015 to prepare the joint action day, which was held on 20 October 2015. More than 100 homes and businesses were searched by police, with more than 1 000 police officers active in both Lithuania and Germany, supported by Europol. In the course of the execution of several European Arrest Warrants (EAWs) issued by Germany, 47 arrests were made and a considerable amount of cash and stolen goods were confiscated. The arrested persons included leaders of the OCG. Liaison

officers of the Lithuanian and German police were exchanged to enhance the effectiveness of the operation. To facilitate the joint actions, Eurojust representatives were in direct contact with the national authorities throughout the joint action day.

Judgements

On 14 July 2016, two Lithuanian nationals were convicted by the District Court (Landgericht) Essen inter alia for having jointly committed aggravated organised theft, receiving custodial sentences of 9 and 7 years, respectively, for more than 70 thefts.

Results

In total, the common efforts of the German and Lithuanian authorities, supported by Eurojust, led to the discovery of 440 individual criminal acts. Eighty-five perpetrators have been charged, with combined prison sentences of more than 100 years, the individual highest being 9 years in Germany and 14 years in Lithuania. Nearly EUR 58 000 was confiscated.



Eurojust

Eurojust actively contributed to the success of the investigations, bringing the German investigators into direct contact with their Lithuanian counterparts. The Eurojust coordination meetings and support during the joint action day led to the dismantling of the OCGs. Eurojust supported the information exchange and helped to resolve potential conflicts of jurisdiction and other legal and evidential problems.

A German investigator said:

'Whenever we investigators were running into problems, Eurojust opened a new door and enabled us to continue on the successful road of cooperation.'