



#EU60 - #Eurojust15

An interview with Leif Görts

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Sixty years of European integration is a long period on which to reflect. Eurojust celebrates its 15th year of existence this year. In the field of criminal justice, major changes took place in less than two decades. Leif Görts, who is the National Member for Sweden at Eurojust and has been working as a prosecutor since 1990, talks about the changes seen in his profession.

'I was at police training in the spring of 1990 in the Stockholm harbour. There were regular ferries from Finland at the time, and after the fall of the Berlin wall, the harbour was expected to develop further, as a response to the opening up of the Eastern Bloc. The police officer with me said: "This will look so different in the future." And now, in 2017, it really does. There has been an enormous change – even more than we expected.

Sweden joined the European Union in 1995. I remember a survey at the time for prosecutors, in which we were asked: "Will EU membership affect your work?" I answered "No". Even at that time, just over twenty years ago, it was not possible to see how much change the European Union will bring. I have been working at Eurojust for years now, so history proved me wrong.

Since the 1990s, new types of criminality have emerged – an organised, cross-border criminal element that did not exist before, at least not at this level. And this criminality does not happen only in Europe; we see it on all continents.

I see the European Union as a way to tackle the growth of global organised crime – fraud, terrorism, trafficking in drugs and human beings – and this is our work, here at Eurojust.

Eurojust is like an EU factory, in which we use EU tools, like freezing orders, coordination meetings and joint investigation teams. We use this legal framework to catch criminals. We are working based on legal instruments that did not exist fifteen years ago, and which people were only dreaming about. I will never forget the first joint investigation teams I participated in at Eurojust, which made it possible to have the leader of a crime gang arrested after putting together evidence from Sweden and many other Member States. This achievement would have been almost impossible without the coordination and support Eurojust provides.

The work of a criminal prosecutor is to put together a robust case, to have the facts and their analysis so that he or she can answer questions from the judge. Eurojust helps with this preparation in cross-border cases, because it provides instant access to colleagues across Europe, who can take action and agree on how an investigation and prosecution will proceed. Eurojust also helps in getting information on, for example, the definition of fraud in another Member State, or how evidence needs to be collected so that it can be used. Eurojust also has the expertise in using EU tools, such as the European Arrest Warrant, and in working with networks of specialised prosecutors. In the end, all this easily accessible expertise allows the practitioners back home to make their cases, to plan on doing things in the way that is accepted by the courts, and to put criminals behind bars, even when they have been operating in more than one country.

Looking at what we have achieved in working this way, imagining the alternative is difficult. Without EU cooperation in the criminal justice field, we would have to go back to border controls for all countries, and also control cross-border financial transactions, with no free movement at all. Many of the most important achievements of the European Union in the last 60 years would no longer work.'