

Finland assumed the [Presidency of the Council of the European Union](#) on 1 July 2019.

A **key priority for Finland’s Presidency** is to **strengthen common values** and **the rule of law**. The Finnish Presidency will also focus on making the EU more competitive and socially inclusive, strengthening the EU’s position as a global leader in climate action and in comprehensively protecting the security of citizens.

The EU’s success story is anchored in democratic institutions, human rights and **the rule of law**. 2019 also marks **20 years** since the **European Council Meeting in Tampere** (15-16 October 1999), where Finland played a crucial role in the **decision to create Eurojust** and set up **structured cooperation between judicial authorities** in the EU.

Eurojust has been playing a key role in facilitating judicial cooperation between national authorities in different States and supporting their activity in tackling serious transnational crime.



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Eurojust cases involving Finland (as requesting and requested country)

- 50 new cases in 2019*
- 103 ongoing cases from previous years
- Participation in 5 coordination meetings/coordination centres

**January-June 2019*

*‘By **combating cross-border crime and terrorism**, the EU and its Member States can make the EU a safer place to live. **Eurojust plays a very important role** in ensuring this security. Our slogan - **Criminal justice across borders** - shows it very clearly. **Only together can we tackle serious cross-border crime**’, stated Piia Vottonen, National Member for Finland at Eurojust during the past four years.*

Finland has been involved in many cases at Eurojust, helping dismantle organised crime groups, particularly in drug trafficking and trafficking in human beings. In the first six months of 2019, the **Finnish National Desk** has been involved in **over 150 cases helping to solve transnational crime**, together with Eurojust colleagues and judicial authorities from different countries.

Eurojust and Finland – highlights of casework cooperation

Stopping international drug trafficking: € 2.8 million seized, 15 offenders convicted

In MARCH 2018, a large organised crime group involved in **drug trafficking** in Finland and the Netherlands was dismantled with the help of Eurojust. The drugs were trafficked via Germany and Sweden. An estimated €2.8 million was seized as a result of the action.



Seized amphetamine packages

© The Finnish National Bureau of Investigation

This was one of the largest investigations of drug trafficking in Finland, especially in the region of Pirkanmaa, from which most of the Finnish suspects originated.

Since October 2017, Eurojust has been supporting the Finnish authorities in advancing the case. This active cooperation with national authorities from all the countries involved enabled its success.

Eurojust facilitated the simultaneous execution of **European Investigation Orders** and **European Arrest Warrants** and assisted in the development of coordinated strategies for the joint operations of the Finnish, Dutch, German and Swedish national authorities via a **coordination centre** established at Eurojust. The Finnish authorities took on-the-spot investigative measures during the action day at the coordination centre, which provided the necessary judicial support to the investigation. Without Eurojust's intervention, cross-border actions would have been very difficult to perform, such as collecting relevant evidence for prosecution.

The Finnish prosecutor, Kaisa Ahva, present at both a coordination meeting and a coordination centre at Eurojust, stated on her experience on the case: *'The coordination meeting gave me and colleagues from other countries involved in the*

operation the opportunity to agree on how and where the prosecution would take place to best facilitate the resolution of the case. The action day was crucial. I issued several EIOs, which were signed and passed on the spot to the Dutch colleagues. For me, the biggest added value of the coordination meeting and coordination centre at Eurojust were the contacts established with the colleagues in other countries, which significantly improved the future direct communication necessary in the case.'



Concealed drugs found in a rental car, Helsinki, Finland

© The Finnish National Bureau of Investigation

The German and Swedish national authorities supported the Finnish authorities' investigation and cooperated on the basis of **mutual legal assistance requests**. In the Netherlands, suspects were arrested and house searches were conducted by the International Legal Assistance Centre (IRC) of Limburg. During these actions, important evidence was obtained for the Finnish authorities. Through the close and active cooperation of the national authorities with Eurojust and Europol, 19 members of the organised crime group (OCG) were detained in Finland. A total of 39 individuals (included 11 extradited from the Netherlands) were suspected of aggravated drug offences and concealing the proceeds of crime connected to those drug offences.

In addition to drug trafficking, the investigation focused on seven suspected money laundering offences related to the trafficking of drugs between Finland and the Netherlands.

#JusticeDone: Up to 13 years in prison

By July 2019, 15 suspects on trial in this case were sentenced to **up to 13 years of imprisonment** by the Finnish authorities and began to serve their sentences. 7 other suspects were charged with conditional imprisonment for narcotics offences and money laundering.

Halting sexual exploitation: Coordinated action in 15 countries brings down sex trafficking ring and freezes criminal profits of €1.5 million

In JULY 2019, an organised crime group (OCG) involved in **trafficking of women for sexual exploitation** and **money laundering** in at least 15 countries, including Finland, was dismantled with the help of Eurojust.



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11 EU Member States and **4 third countries** participated in a joint action, which resulted in the arrest of the main suspects of the OCG in Malta, Romania and Finland. Almost €0.5 million in cash, as well as equipment, illegal assets, such as luxury items, and false documentation were seized, and several web domains were confiscated. Companies' shares and bank accounts worth €1.5 million were frozen and 17 house searches were carried out.

Due to the **cross-border dimension of the investigation**, a Eurojust case was opened in 2016, which targeted the Finnish leader of the OCG. From his base in Marbella, Spain, the alleged main suspect managed websites advertising sexual services offered by women who worked as prostitutes in Finland and Sweden. A number of other similar OCGs in various countries used those websites to also profit from advertising their victims' services. The activities also involved transnational money laundering and aggravated pandering in the Nordic counties.

Four **coordination meetings** with the presence of the Spanish, Finnish and Swedish competent authorities were organised by Eurojust between 2016 and 2018. To speed up the criminal investigations into the OCG, Eurojust swiftly set up

a **joint investigation team (JIT)** with Spain, Finland and Sweden.

Through the JIT, Eurojust financed the deployment of 9 Spanish police officers to Malta, Romania and Finland. Europol supported the joint operations by deploying mobile offices in Spain, Malta and Finland and by participating in the coordination centre set up at Eurojust.

The setting up of the JIT allowed for swift evidence gathering and information sharing. National authorities worked together in gathering complementary information to resolve the case. For instance, the Spanish authorities were investigating alleged money laundering in Spain while the Finnish authorities were investigating alleged aggravated pandering in Finland.

Eurojust played a crucial role in reaching an agreement on the best place to prosecute and secure proper immediate judicial follow-up to the case.

During the **joint action day**, Eurojust set up a **coordination centre** at its premises in The Hague to coordinate simultaneous operations in 15 different countries, allowing for real-time exchange of information. From its side, Finland sent Finnish investigators to Spain for the joint action day, while the National Bureau of Investigation was responsible and led measures in Finland during the action day.

In addition, Eurojust enabled the quick issuance of several **European Investigation Orders** towards Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania and the UK. Eurojust also assisted in swiftly submitting **mutual legal assistance (MLA)** requests to the USA, Russia, Hong Kong, Panama and Colombia.

Meet the Finnish National Member

Piia Vottonen has been the **National Member for Finland at Eurojust** for the past four years (2015–2019) and is returning to Finland at the end of July 2019. *‘Eurojust is the bridge-maker for judicial collaboration’*, stated Piia in a farewell interview with Eurojust.



Looking back at her experience here, she stated:

‘World and criminal activities are evolving fast, which is why judicial collaboration becomes even more crucial to respond to these threats. Working in Eurojust has given me the opportunity to easily rely on this judicial cooperation and helped me a lot in my day-to-day activities. I know where to find the competent judicial authority for obtaining judicial assistance either directly or via Eurojust.’

As regards the added value of Eurojust and what she will be taking back with her, Piia added:

‘One of the key things I will be taking with me from Eurojust is a network of colleagues whom I can ask for assistance in finding the right contact person in his/her country. Eurojust responds quickly to requests for assistance, facilitates the exchange of information across borders and supports national judicial authorities in overcoming legal and practical obstacles. Eurojust also promotes trust and partnership and helps tackle criminal justice across borders.’

Thinking about her operational experience in Eurojust, Piia gave an example of a case for which she could respond quickly to her national counterparts, thanks to the real-time exchange information facilitated by her presence in Eurojust: *‘In a Finnish/Italian case on procuring and trafficking of human beings, I experienced first-hand the value of timely judicial cooperation and exchange of information in Eurojust.’*

Two days before the deadline for prosecuting, the Finnish prosecutor sent a request for obtaining information from Italy. She wanted to know whether Italian authorities started or were possibly

planning to start investigations towards a detained person in Finland.

In Italy, there is no central register where the requested information could have been checked directly. The Finnish prosecutor received the requested information within 24 hours and she could follow up accordingly on the case.

This shows our attitude at Eurojust – we don’t say we can’t, we say we’ll try and we do it’, concluded Piia.

Lilja Limingoja will become the **new National Member for Finland** as of 1 August 2019.

‘Eurojust is flexible, easy to access and effective: flexible because of the different types of cooperation it facilitates; easy to access because of the National Members working together under one roof; and effective because of the fast and qualitative work it brings’, stated Lilja.



She sees her new assignment as a great opportunity: *‘I have been working for a long period as a prosecutor in Finland, and now, in a way, I do not need to change the work. I am still working as a prosecutor, not with my own cases, but with my colleagues’ cases. Eurojust’s family is a working community where you have the Finnish National Desk, other National Desks, other colleagues and corporate staff; in a way, you have different kinds of people and different positions, all working together, which is fascinating.’*

In terms of expectations during her mandate, Lilja added:

‘I hope that we will be discussing the digital way of handling things and advance on this during my time at Eurojust. The EIOs and MLAs sent from an authority in one country to another is nowadays still done on paper, in a traditional way of sending and receiving them. In the future, we will need a digital and secure platform for exchanging in real time this type of information’.

For more information about Finland and Eurojust, watch our video [here](#).

Finnish art at Eurojust

As part of an already established tradition, Eurojust displays in its lobby and public floors selected artwork of the country holding the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Now it is Finland's turn to embellish Eurojust's building with paintings and photographs made by two Finnish artists. Get to know more about them in the interviews below.

Mrs Kirsti Ijäs-de Fluiter, painter



© Kirsti Ijäs-de Fluiter

I was born in Finland. I studied nursing in Seinäjoki and Helsinki. After working in hospitals, I made the switch to marketing manager in a hospital equipment firm. Later, I worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross in catastrophic areas in the Middle and Far East. I lived with my family in Switzerland and South Africa before moving in 1984 to the Netherlands. Since my husband's retirement, we divide our time between the Netherlands, France and Finland.

When did you start painting?

I started painting more than 60 years ago, I was inspired by my secondary school art teacher. It was more of a hobby the first years. I followed some courses and painted in my free time. After moving to the Netherlands, I wanted to learn more and develop myself as an artist. I enrolled at the Academie voor Schone Kunsten in Ardonk, Belgium, where I got a very classical technical education. Since then, I have had both group and solo exhibitions in the Netherlands, Belgium, England and Finland.

The paintings at Eurojust are inspired by nature. In the hall are two bombastic and colourful flowers, which celebrate life in abundance.



© Kirsti Ijäs-de Fluiter

For the guest dining room, I have selected two paintings from the series Silent Universe. They are much more subdued. The paintings in this series started out as very figurative, literal landscapes. Along the way, I started leaving out elements and stripping down the paintings to their essence. They are meant to convey the peace and silence I feel in the vastness of Finnish nature.



© Kirsti Ijäs-de Fluiter

What do you like people to know about Finland?

Finland can be a refuge from the troubles of the modern world. The different kinds of nature, be it the desolate rough plains and hills of Lapland or the wonderful archipelago, the thickly grown forests or the fresh lakes. They all instill in the visitor a calmness and inner peace.

The message I convey with my paintings

Mostly, daily life is busy and full of stress, but I relax by both the act of painting and the subject matter. I like to show the beauty of (Finnish) nature. I hope my paintings convey this feeling to the people working at Eurojust. Perhaps brighten their day, even just subconsciously. Hopefully, they will give the passers-by a momentary respite from their hectic day.

Mr Niko Laurila, photographer



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I am a young photographer from Porvoo, Finland. My pictures became famous in Finland during the last few years, particularly on my social media channels. Photographing - capturing beautiful things - is one of my greatest passions and I am happy to be able to do this as a job. Last December, I was nominated as a "Citizen of the Year 2018" in Porvoo.

When did you start your work in photography?



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I started photographing when I was about 13. Porvoo is the second oldest town in Finland, so we have a lot of idyllic houses and narrow lanes, beautiful scenes to shoot. I published my first Porvoo photos on social media in 2014 and I started getting some attention. That encouraged me to continue. Since then, I have more active followers. At the end of my business studies, I realised photographing could be something more than just a hobby, and I set up my own company in 2015.

The photographs in Eurojust show the amazing Finnish nature. We have four totally different seasons: white, blue, black and cold winters; green and full of light springs; summers full of colours and red, orange, yellow and brown autumns, we call them "ruska" in Finnish. The light varies

throughout the year, so the same landscape looks different depending on the season or on the moment of the day. That keeps the same landscape interesting time after time.



© Niko Laurila Photography



I also shoot portraits, weddings and commercial photos. My pictures might tell a totally different story of Finland to the foreigners than they expect. I hope they will experience the moments behind all the pictures, the same beauty, silence and relaxing feelings and maybe they will want to visit Finland one day.

What is your favourite place for taking photos?

The Finnish archipelago and northern Finland (Lapland). My favorite, though, remains my home town, Porvoo, where most of the pictures in this exhibition have been taken. I especially love the light and colours of sunsets and sunrises. Those moments last a short time, so to get the best photos one needs to be quick, which makes the work challenging and exciting.



© Niko Laurila Photography

What do you like people to know about Finland?

I'm proud of the nature in Finland; the landscapes vary from south to north and the four seasons make it different throughout the year.

The message I convey with my photos...

I hope my photographs will give beauty and joy to everyone working and visiting Eurojust during the next 6 months. I hope people will take the time to notice all the beauty in the world.