



The Just Married case: stopping exploitation of Czech women in sham marriages with Kosovar men



 The Czech authorities investigated an organized crime group (OCG) that arranged sham marriages to enable Kosovar men to enter and live in the territory of Schengen countries, mainly Germany

The OCG contacted and recruited Czech women from vulnerable groups living in extreme poverty, mostly of Roma origin, as instrumental to their plot. The OCG charged about 20,000 EUR per marriage. The women would obtain a gain of about 300 EUR.

 A parallel investigation was being conducted in Germany where it was detected that the marriages were contracted on several federal states (the epicentre being in Hamburg) and under forged documents. The German investigation had links with Bulgaria, Romania and Kosovo. More than 70 cases had been detected.

 EUROJUST

Eurojust assisted with the execution of mutual legal assistance instruments and coordinated further actions leading to the setting up of a **joint investigation team**, funded by Eurojust. One of the main challenges encountered in the investigation of this case was that in Germany, legislation on marriage is not harmonised at national level. Civil registries are held at municipal level, which renders checks difficult and provides easier grounds to the OCGs to conduct this way of smuggling in several locations with the same brides". To overcome this question, the investigation team suggested the setting up of a "task force at federal level involving all institutional actors. For the full dismantling of the OCG, the German investigators **traced the source of the migration flow by including in the Task Force the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the German Embassy in Kosovo**, to raise awareness and seek the cooperation of the Kosovar government. Eurojust organised a **coordination meeting in Prague, which enabled participation of more than 20 officials** both from Germany and the Czech Republic. Several other operational meetings addressed difficulties related to a potential lack of jurisdiction and the possibilities to **concentrate the investigations/prosecutions**.

As a result of a joint action day, 38 indictments were issued in Germany.

This case contributed to the creation of multi-disciplinary law enforcement teams in Germany at federal state level to tackle the sham marriage phenomenon. Since 2017, these teams are composed of forensic officers, THB specialists, specialists in organised crime and experts in fraud, which shows the poly-criminality feature of this form of smuggling.

