

Operation 'Vantage': upstream coordination to link criminal networks involved in sham marriages with Latvian brides in Ireland



2016: a Pakistani national residing in Ireland travelled regularly to Latvia and was believed to be the organiser and recruiter of numerous marriages of convenience involving Latvian women. Ireland opened a case at Eurojust, seeking judicial cooperation from Latvia to bring possible organisers and recruiters of Latvian brides to justice. 

Marriages of convenience are not criminalised under Irish law. Criminal charges can only be pressed for related offences such as conspiracy to defraud, deception, and forgery of documents, which minimal penalties.



In Latvia, marriage of convenience became a criminal offence in 2013. Due to the limited case law and the significant variations in penalties imposed, prosecutions were still difficult.



In a coordination meeting, Latvia linked the case to the investigation of another Pakistani national, heading a network responsible for at least 60 marriages of convenience. Both suspects were linked and the modus operandi was confirmed by both the Latvian and Irish authorities. At the meeting, extensive discussions were held on the respective legal frameworks to assess the most effective investigation and prosecution strategies. The case is still ongoing.



The case shows the importance of coordination and exchange of information to combat sham marriages. When Irish Registrars of Marriages in 2015 were granted powers to determine whether marriages are marriages of convenience, marriage applications with third State nationals dropped significantly.

The case is also an example of how flexible criminal groups act in relocating to Member States in which legislation is more favourable.

A multidisciplinary approach, involving e.g., civil registry personnel, is particularly effective in cases in which the suspected activities go beyond the strict remit of the judiciary, such as sham marriages.

