



ISFP-2020-AG-IBA-ONNET-101052683-ISF4@ON
OPERATIONAL NETWORK @ON TO TACKLE TOP LEVEL OCGS AND MAFIA-STYLE STRUCTURES

ABSTRACT

1. INTRODUCTION

On **December 4th, 2014**, the **@ON Operational Network** was officially approved by the **EU Council - JHA¹**, following the proposal of the Italian Antimafia Directorate (DIA).

The “**EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime 2021-2025**”², inter alia, stated:

“Against this landscape, it is crucial to scale up the dismantling of organised crime structures, targeting those groups that are a higher risk to Europe’s security and the individuals in the higher echelons of criminal organisations”;

“At European level, the operational cooperation against mafia-style organised crime groups carried out through the @ON Network facilitates the on-site deployment of specialised investigators across Member States to assist in investigations into cross-border organised crime groups”.

2. AIMS AND PURPOSES

The purpose of @ON is to strengthen transnational law enforcement agencies (LEAs) cooperation against top-level organized crime groups (OCGs) and mafia-style affecting the EU Member States, focusing on the OCGs as such, regardless of the offence committed.

The **criminal groups under investigation** are mainly Italian, Eurasian, Albanian OCGs and outlaw motorcycle criminal gangs, but also the new ones (i.e. Chinese, Nigerian, Turkish OCGs etc.), posing an increasing threat to EU security and economy.

3. HOW IT WORKS

The @ON Network, in coordination with Europol, makes it possible for the EU Member States partner to request the **quick deployment on the spot** of @ON Network investigators, as consultants³. They are investigators specialized in the fight against this kind of criminal networks.

In this way, LEAs can share the most effective investigative techniques, facilitating the exchange of best practises and the necessary trust relationship.

@ON Network also supports the existing initiatives to improve the **administrative approach** in the fight against organised crime groups, with a view to detect and recover the assets illegally acquired by criminal organizations.

The EU Commission, with the ISF⁴ Direct Grant, will support the activities of the @ON Network with additional 2 million euros through the “ISF4@ON” Project (ISFP-2020-AG-IBA-ONNET-nr. 101052683) for further 24 months (2022-2023). As of February 1, 2022, there are ongoing interlocutions for a next *Grant* for 2024-2025.

The @ON Network is based on a “**Core Group**” (**Italy, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium and The Netherlands**) serving as a control room, with the aim of selecting the investigations on priority targets to be supported.

¹ Justice Home Affairs

² The EU Commission document COM(2021)170 final, dated 14/04/2021

³ @ON investigators (as experts) do not act as *police officers* and operate according to the legislation of the requesting Member State

⁴ *Internal Security Fund. An ad-hoc first project (ISFP-2017-AG-IBA-ONNET-nr.817618) started on November 2018, which lasted about 38 months, for an amount of 600.000 euros*

The **information exchange** is through the SIENA safe channel among the involved LEAs and Europol for the analysis support.

4. @ON NETWORK SUPPORT

a. Deployment of investigators:

- deployment on the spot of specialised @ON investigators to support the investigative Units of requesting Countries, through *Operational Missions (OM)* or *Operational Experts* with long-term deployment on the spot (**OE**);
- operational meetings/action days with the involved LEAs;

b. Special Investigation Tools by renting *Technical Equipment (TE)*, reimbursement of operational expenses related to lawful *covert human intelligence activities (CHIS)*, *Undercover Operations (UCO)* and expenses for *Language Assistance (LA)*.

5. @ON NETWORK PARTNERS

Up to now **44** LEAs, representing **37** countries have adhered to **@ON Network**.

France⁵, Germany, Spain⁶, Belgium, The Netherlands and **Italy** are *Core Group members* of the Network. Together with **Europol** other partners are: **Hungary, Austria, Romania, Australia, Malta, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Poland, Croatia, Georgia, Norway, Albania⁷, Portugal, USA, Sweden, Canada, Latvia, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Ukraine, Cyprus, Bosnia and Herzegovina⁸, Ireland, Kosovo, Finland, Greece** and **Moldova**.

Italy is represented by the **DIA** as Project leader and by the Carabinieri Corps, the Guardia di Finanza and the National Police as partners⁹.

6. @ON NETWORK RESULTS

At present, the @ON Network's support to @ON Member States Investigative Units can be summarized as follows: **142 investigations, 496 missions funded** in favour of **2.060 investigators** – leading to the **arrest of 887 persons**, including **10 fugitives** - and the **seizure** of about **239,4 million euros** (cash and assets), **drugs, weapons, vehicles, luxury watches and commercial activities**.

The @ON Network also aims at developing a more structured approach through a closer link with EMPACT in the fight against organized crime groups.

Rome (IT), August 21, 2023

⁵ Police Nationale and Gendarmerie Nationale

⁶ Policía Nacional and Guardia Civil

⁷ CPD - Criminal Police Department and NBI- National Bureau of Investigation;

⁸ Directorate for Coordination of Police Bodies of Bosnia and Herzegovina and BRCKO District Police

⁹ Coordination, at the national level, is provided through the International Police Cooperation Service (SCIP) of the Central Directorate of Criminal Police