



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

# JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS



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## **Massive blow to international gang of skimming fraudsters**

A massive blow has been dealt to a large international skimming network after a major police operation coordinated from the Europol operational centre in The Hague. The operation led to 24 arrests this week. Eurojust coordinated the judicial part of the operation, which involves Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Romania.

So far the network is suspected of skimming at least 15.000 payment cards in the EU, for a total of over 35.000 fraudulent transactions and losses amounting to about € 6,5 million.

In this case the “skimming” crime consisted in the perpetrator placing a device over the card slot of an automatic cash distribution machine (ATM), which reads the magnetic stripe as the users pass their cards through it. These devices are often used in conjunction with a pinhole camera to read the user's PIN code at the same time. Details of copied payment cards are then used for illegal cash withdrawal.

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## **Asian crime gang dismantled in Budapest**

Hungarian Customs and Finance Guard (VPOP) this week launched a coordinated operation against several criminal networks involved in fraudulent imports of goods to the European Union (EU), leading to substantial losses in customs duties and VAT. More than 200 officers, including special arrest teams of VPOP and the National Investigation Bureau, searched 64 premises in Budapest and several locations across the country.

The operation was targeting Asian organised criminals based in Hungary. 10 people of Chinese, Vietnamese and Hungarian nationality were arrested. Based on evidence found during the searches, further national and international (European) arrest warrants were issued against



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four Chinese and one Hungarian national. Cash approximating EUR 250,000 was seized by the authorities.

This operation is part of an ongoing joint multinational campaign – called ‘Operation Beijing’ – in which several EU Member States participate and which is coordinated and supported by Europol and Eurojust. Operation Beijing’s objective is to collect, collate and analyse intelligence concerning criminal networks of mostly Chinese origin, causing several hundred million euro of annual losses of VAT and customs duties. By utilising falsified sales invoices and transport documents, the criminal networks import garments, shoes, agricultural products and foodstuffs to be sold further on the black market or to legal business structures at favourable prices.

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