

**EU Funding Programme, Criminal Justice (JLS/2008/JPEN 031)**

**Project:**

*More Exchange and Better Cooperation Against Economic Offences*



**Project Report**



## **A. Overview**

Cross-border economic crime in Europe has been steadily increasing over the past few years. This is cause for great concern considering the associated potential of injury to society, loss of reputation of the legal order, and long-term damage to the economy. In this context, the Federal Ministry of Justice of the Federal Republic of Germany and the justice ministries of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Austria and the Slovak Republic embarked on a transnational programme of cooperation to fight economic crime. With this aim in mind, they worked together to design a project for the *Criminal Justice 2008* programme of the European Commission. The aim of the project was to improve judicial cooperation and promote a better mutual understanding of criminal justice practices in the participating States. This was a two-year project, running from 2009 to 2010.

In order to promote an exchange of knowledge and experiences, and to improve practice in the field of justice, the project brought together judges, public prosecutors, police and customs officers, representatives of the justice ministries and staff from the European institutions. Participants in the project were able to share experiences from each of their countries, highlight the differences in their criminal justice systems, and identify ways of ensuring more efficient cooperation at the European level.

## **B. Project Milestones**

The project was executed in the form of four workshops held from 1 to 4 March 2009 in Prague, 8 to 11 November 2009 in Vienna, 20 to 23 June 2010 in Bratislava and 12 to 15 December 2010 in Berlin.

### **1. Prague Workshop**

The launch event opened with an opportunity for everybody to get to know each other and to discuss the envisaged objectives of the project.

This was followed by presentations on various aspects of cross-border economic crime. Using cases they had encountered in practice, participants gave specific examples of their investigations, experiences and the legal structures underlying the work they do in their home countries. The problems of cross-border legal assistance were also identified. Cross-border commercial fraud, tax and intellectual property offences, and money laundering were key topics of the discussion. The participants drew an overall positive conclusion and expressed the hope that the personal contacts they had now established would considerably ease future cooperation in fighting cross-border crime.

## **2. Vienna Workshop**

This workshop focused on criminal offences in the areas of banking and financial services, the responsibilities of justice personnel in the field of financial crime, and European and international cooperation in fighting economic crime. The event was punctuated by a number of presentations, for example on the focus of investigations in each of the project countries, and by descriptions of cases that had been encountered in practice. These provided material for the subsequent discussions. Those who attended the workshop praised the high standard of the presentations given and the productive conversations that followed.

## **3. Bratislava Workshop**

During this workshop, discussions focussed primarily on the following two areas: international trade in counterfeit medicinal products and protecting the financial interests of the European Community. After a series of informative presentations and examples of cases encountered in practice, attention was drawn to the necessity of enhancing cooperation between the project States, as well as with other affected countries and the countries where counterfeit products originate.

## **4. Berlin Workshop**

The closing event focused on VAT carousels and asset recovery in fighting economic crime. As the workshop came to a close, participants were given the opportunity to draw some conclusions from the series of events as a whole, i.e. the workshops in Prague, Vienna, Bratislava and Berlin. Everybody agreed that enhanced cross-border cooperation was needed for the future. The participants also emphasised the importance of the knowledge they had gained and the personal contacts they had established. In their overall feedback, the participants reported that the project had fully satisfied their expectations, both in terms of structure and outcome.

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Annexes