

The European Union approach to transnational organized crime and challenges in implementation and enforcement with a particular focus on smuggling and trafficking of persons by sea

Dr. Ana I. Sánchez Ruiz
European Commission

Abstract:

The European Union activities with regard to the smuggling and trafficking of persons by sea are at the crossroads of two main policy areas: the fight against organized crime, and border control and immigration.

The European Community is a party to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols on the trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants by land, air and sea. Legislation has been passed at EU level to criminalize the trafficking in persons and the facilitation of illegal immigration, and for the protection of victims. The European Police Office (EUROPOL) and the EU's Judicial Cooperation Unit (EUROJUST) support EU Member States' cooperation in the repression of such criminal activities.

The European Union is particularly concerned by the smuggling of persons by sea at its southern borders, as well as by other criminal activities such as the illicit traffic of drugs. Countering those activities is a political priority for the European Institutions and for our Member States.

The European Union is promoting the integrated management of its external borders. Within this strategy, the reinforcement of border controls and surveillance at the most critical areas is particularly relevant in the prevention and suppression of the smuggling and trafficking of persons by sea. The European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (FRONTEX) has an important role in promoting cooperation and supporting EU Member States in the fulfillment of their border control responsibilities under EU law. Several sea surveillance operations are coordinated by the Agency, including the establishment of a European Patrols Network, defining joint patrolling areas between neighbouring EU Member States. In the coming years, an integrated network of maritime reporting and surveillance systems should be established.

The European Union is intensifying international cooperation within a "Global Approach to Migration" and through partnerships with relevant countries. Important elements in countering human smuggling and trafficking include capacity-building and technical assistance, operational cooperation, cooperation on return and facilitation and promotion of legal migration channels. Economic and social development and good governance and respect of human rights are pre-conditions for the success of any strategy aiming at the abolition of these criminal practices.