

18 Arrests in Migrant Smuggling Operation on the Balkan Route

Officers from the Romanian Police (Poliția Română) and Border Police (Poliția de Frontieră Română), supported by Europol, have dismantled an organized crime group involved in migrant smuggling across the so-called Balkan route.

The action day on July 29 led to 22 house searches, 18 arrests, and the seizure of munitions, vehicles, mobile phones and €22,000 in cash.

The criminal network, active since October 2020, consisted of Egyptian, Iraqi, Syrian and Romanian citizens. The criminal group had cells in the countries across the Balkan route from where regional facilitators managed the recruitment, accommodation and transport of migrants from Jordan, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Several criminal cells based in Romania facilitated the border crossing from Bulgaria and Serbia of groups of migrants and arranged their temporary accommodation in the area of Bucharest and in western Romania. The migrants were then smuggled to Hungary on their way to Germany as a final destination. In total, 26 illegal transports of migrants were intercepted and 490 migrants were detected in an attempt to illegally cross the Romanian border. The criminal group was involved in other criminal activities such as drug trafficking, document fraud and property crime.

Migrants were paying between € 4,000 and € 10,000 depending on the trafficking segment. For example, the price for facilitating the crossing from Romania to Germany was between € 4,000 and € 5,000. The migrants, some of which were families with young children, were accommodated in extremely poor conditions, often with no access to toilets or running water. For the safe houses, the suspects rented accommodations or used the residences of group members, mainly situated in the areas of Călărași County, Ialomița County and Timișoara. In one of the safe houses, measuring about 60 m², the suspects hid 100 people at the same time. The migrants were then transferred in risky conditions in overcrowded lorries between merchandise and in vans hidden in concealments without proper ventilation.

Europol facilitated the exchange of information and provided analytical support.

On the action day, Europol deployed one analyst to Romania to cross-check operational information against Europol's databases in real time to provide leads to investigators in the field.

Source:

<https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/border-security/18-arrests-in-migrant-smuggling-operation-on-the-balkan-route/>

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