Background information

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**Practical meaning and added value of the UMF3+ project for EU law enforcement**

Access to information stored by Europol has been stipulated in Europol Regulation (ER) article 20. The article states that member states shall, in accordance with their national law and Article 7(5), have access to, and be able to search, all information which has been provided for the purposes of points (a) and (b) of Article 18(2).

This means information submitted to Europol for the purposes of cross-checking aimed at identifying connections or other relevant links between information and analyses of a strategic or thematic nature and the access to this kind of information can be direct. In practice this means mostly data that is stored in what is usually called the EIS (Information System) part of Europol's information system.

Direct access to this data is already functioning through the native user interface of EIS and especially Finland has taken to using this data extensively for risk analysis among other things. Finland made 69% of all EIS searches in 2018.

The UMF 3+ project aims at automatizing access and querying Europol's data directly from national systems. The functionality is called QUEST (Querying Europol System) and it is to be piloted in the EU funded project lasting for 36 months and being funded by ISF –money of about 3m€. The participants of the project are Germany, Austria, Estonia, Finland, France, Malta, Latvia, Spain and Sweden. QUEST is a system interface (Search Web Service) enabling MS law enforcement officers, working on a single computer, to automatically consult Europol databases simultaneously with their own national system/s, possibly also SISII and INTERPOL.

QUEST is also envisaged to be a part of the EU interoperability landscape allowing MS searches through European Search Porta (ESP) directly to Europol data in addition to the centralized EU – databases.

At first stage the QUEST functionality will only support queries to the EIS part of the system and probably give instant added operational value to those member states that still underuse this part of data stored by Europol.

The next step of the project is to open up the possibility for MS to do indirect hit-no-hit searches to Europol's Analysis System EAS. This is stipulated in ER art 20.2 where it says that Member States shall, in accordance with their national law and Article 7(5), have indirect access on the basis of a hit/no hit system to information provided for the purposes of point (c) (operational analyses) of Article 18(2).

When hit-no-hit access to EAS is opened this will greatly enhance Member States' possibilities to utilize data stored by Europol as the data pool in EAS far outnumbers that of the EIS (about 10 times as many person objects).

According to information available at present Europol will be able to open hit-no-hit access to its analysis system by 2020. This should accelerate Member States' access to Europol information and tenfold the amount of person objects available for national analysis. The anticipated operational benefit can at best be very significant.


Chief Superintendent      Anssi Kangas