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Internal security: what role should Europol play in supporting Member States?

In a rapidly changing world marked by profound geopolitical upheavals, the European Union's internal security is inevitably affected. The current realignment of international relations is placing increasing pressure on the EU's internal security, making the structural threats already facing Member States even more complex and unpredictable. These threats are constantly shifting in nature and intensity: organised crime and terrorism increasingly rely on cybercrime and the exploitation of new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence[1].

Internal security has become one of the defining issues for the European Union. Long regarded as a primarily national responsibility, it has gradually emerged as an area in which collective European action is no longer merely useful, but essential. The rapid and profound changing nature of the threats facing our societies requires us to rethink the instruments, methods and partnerships underpinning police cooperation in Europe. In this context, the question is no longer whether a European response is necessary, but how to organise it in a way that is effective, proportionate and respectful of national competences.

Since its founding, [Europol](#) has supported the deepening of European police cooperation between Member States. Initially established as a platform for the exchange of information, the Agency has gradually established itself as a centre of operational and analytical expertise serving the Member States. This transformation is far from being complete. The operational strengthening of the Agency even serves as the starting point for a broader reflection on the role that Europol can

and must play in the future architecture of the Union's internal security. The response cannot be fragmented. It must be coordinated, proactive and based on the trust of all European police forces. It is in this context that Europol's role must be considered for the coming years as an operational lever serving Member States.

MOVING TOWARDS EUROPEAN SECURITY BASED ON ANALYSIS AND OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

One of the main challenges ahead lies in the changing nature of organised crime. Criminal networks are now deeply transnational, technologically agile and economically integrated. They exploit the vulnerabilities of our societies, legal loopholes, disparities in resources and delays in cooperation. They adapt rapidly to law enforcement responses. As it faces these globalised, digitalised and financially powerful criminal networks, Europol can provide decisive added value to the law enforcement response delivered by Member States. As the European criminal intelligence hub, Europol is able to link information held by Member States, identify the command structures of networks and direct operational priorities towards the most disruptive targets.

This ability to 'make the invisible visible' will become all the more crucial as the volume of actionable data continues to grow. The challenge for the coming years is to gain a true understanding of the available information. Advanced data analysis, artificial intelligence and new analytical capabilities must be used to go beyond the mere accumulation of data and

[1] This text originally appeared in [the Schuman Report on Europe: The State of the Union 2026](#), published by Hémisphères, Paris, May 2026

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identify connections and trends that cannot be detected through a strictly national lens. And so, Europol is set to establish itself as a genuine European centre for the fusion of criminal intelligence, providing direct support to Member States' police investigations. The ability to anticipate developments is becoming a key factor. Europol must continue to invest in advanced analytical capabilities, whilst ensuring that their use strictly complies with fundamental rights and the principle of proportionality.

EUROPEAN POLICE COOPERATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Digital technology represents a major challenge for internal security. Crime and terrorism are now largely organised online, exploiting encryption technologies, platforms and artificial intelligence. In this context, the very concept of policing is evolving; digital policing is no longer merely a technical specialism, but forms the basis of modern policing.

Europol can play a key role by pooling technical expertise, developing common tools and supporting national services faced with investigations that are increasingly complex from a technological standpoint. This requires enhanced dialogue with private-sector stakeholders, whose detection and innovation skills have become indispensable to internal security.

The future of police cooperation will necessarily require in-depth consideration of lawful access to digital data and, in particular, to encrypted communications, within a legally secure and democratically controlled framework. This is not a matter of pitting security against freedoms, but of ensuring that the rule of law retains its capacity for action in the digital sphere as well. Europol can play a decisive role as a facilitator between law enforcement agencies, judicial authorities, legislators and the private sector to develop balanced and operational solutions.

THE FIGHT AGAINST THE ECONOMIC ROOTS OF CRIME

Above all, organised crime is an economic enterprise. It thrives on its ability to generate, conceal and reinvest

substantial profits. The fight against organised crime must systematically rely on financial investigations, the confiscation of criminal assets and the disruption of illicit financial flows.

Europol can strengthen its role as a European platform for coordinating financial investigations by supporting national authorities in identifying complex money laundering schemes, analysing crypto-assets and cooperating with financial sector stakeholders. The protection of the legitimate economy, market integrity and fair competition is a key issue for internal security and democratic trust.

EUROPEAN POLICE COOPERATION BASED ON TRUST

Europol's future rests, above all, on a fundamental principle: trust. Trust on the part of Member States in the Agency, trust on the part of citizens, and trust on the part of international partners in the European Union's reliability as an actor in the field of security. Any forward-looking consideration of its role must be set within a clear framework. Internal security remains an essential prerogative of the Member States. The Agency has neither the mandate nor the legitimacy to replace national authorities. Its role is that of a facilitator and a capacity multiplier. This trust itself rests on sound governance, rigorous data protection and strict respect for fundamental rights. Against a backdrop of rapid technological change, these safeguards will be more essential than ever to preserve the legitimacy of European police action. Any future development of its mandate must preserve this balance between operational effectiveness and respect for national sovereignty.

European internal security is a dynamic framework that is constantly adapting to increasingly complex, hybrid and transnational threats. Over the past eight years, Europol has undergone profound transformation to meet these challenges. The Agency has gradually established itself as a far more operational player, capable of providing concrete, real-time support to

investigations conducted by Member States. The strengthening of analytical capabilities, the increased integration of advanced technologies – notably through the Digital Forensics Unit, the Innovation Lab and the development of specialised centres (such as the European Centre for Combating Financial and Economic Crime, established in 2020, and the Centre against Migrant Smuggling, launched in December 2025) – has enabled it to transform information into a lever for action and coordination.

In the years to come, this momentum must continue. Europol must consolidate its role as an agency serving the Member States, firmly focused on foresight, innovation and operational cooperation – an agency capable of turning the diversity of national expertise into a collective strength and of translating European cooperation into tangible effectiveness on the ground.

Security cannot be dictated: it is built over time, through trust, professionalism and shared commitment. It is in this spirit that Europol will continue to support national authorities, convinced that a strong, operational European internal security framework that respects European democratic values – whether in the fight against terrorism or against drug trafficking from Latin America – constitutes one of the essential conditions for the Union’s freedom, prosperity and cohesion. In an environment marked by uncertainty and the accelerating pace of geopolitical and technological change, Europol can help to give the European model of internal security a renewed sense of purpose, in pursuit of a fundamental objective: to ensure the protection of European citizens whilst preserving the very foundations of the Union.

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