

- Madam Chair, Distinguished Delegates, I would like to thank you for organising this intersessional meeting and the opportunity for Europol to participate.
- Before I go into detail about Europol's work in the fight against illicit drug trafficking, I would like to say a few words about our Agency in general.
- As the EU agency for law enforcement cooperation, our mission is to contribute to making Europe safer by supporting EU law enforcement in their fight against terrorism, cybercrime and other forms of serious and organised crime.
- We also act as the EU criminal information hub, by connecting the EU Member States with our operational partners like Australia, Canada and the US.
- Moreover, our agency provides top-level expertise to our law enforcement partners.
- Speaking of our partners: as the illicit drug trafficking has a global dimension, I would like to echo the words of the previous speakers by stressing that strong international cooperation is of utmost importance.
- In this regard, UNODC plays a central role in ensuring a coordinated international approach to combatting illicit drug trafficking. Therefore, it goes without saying that a strong partnership between UNODC and Europol is a fundamental requirement in these joint efforts.
- We cooperate regularly and in a structured manner with different partners - I want to mention the well-established cooperation with the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA).
- Also, the cooperation with the MENA region and the Western Balkans remain a top priority.
- We also host a community of about 240 Liaison Officers from the 27 EU Member States and over 50 partner countries, which offers law enforcement a unique networking and coordination platform.
- Currently, Europol has several well-established centres:
 - The European Serious Organised Crime Centre (ESOCC) which also includes the European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC)
 - The European Cybercrime Centre (EC3), hosting also the Joint Cybercrime Action Taskforce – a unique operational platform in the area of law enforcement with currently 17 partners (10 EU Member States and 7 Non-EU partners: Australia, Canada, Colombia, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States)
 - The European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC)
 - The European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC)
- Now I would like to share with you the relevant threats and trends as seen from our perspective but confirming what we have heard already from the previous speakers.
- Virtually all types of organised crime now have a digital dimension supported by the Crime-as-a-Service model offering a wide range of criminal services and tools online.
- This lowers the entry barrier for criminals to commit crime online as they do not necessarily have to have the technical expertise to do so.

- We also see a number of cross-cutting crime facilitating factors such as the criminal abuse of cryptocurrencies and encrypted communication services.
- As highlighted by some of the other distinguished speakers, cryptocurrencies remain an important means of payment for criminal services and products.
- Their illicit use is predominantly linked to extortion, money laundering purposes, the online trade of illicit goods and services, and frauds.
- We have observed that their use by criminals has grown over the past years in terms of volume and sophistication.
- While the traditional offline supply of drugs remains the most widely used means of distribution, the online sales has become more significant and has the potential to expand further.
- New psychoactive substances are frequently traded on the surface web. Heroin, cocaine, cannabis and amphetamine-type stimulants are primarily traded via the dark web.
- The online component of the drug trade is typically linked to the retail level and mostly involves frequent but small individual shipments or as we heard the use of 'dead drops'.
- As mentioned already, the illicit drug trade takes place on dark web forums and marketplaces as well as on the surface web. Criminals abuse encrypted communication channels to advertise their illicit offers to a wider audience.
- Following a number of successful international law enforcement actions against Darkweb market places, we have seen a shift to distributed encrypted communication platforms for illicit online trade, which can further complicate law enforcement investigations.
- Finally, we also see that the COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated the online trade of illicit drugs.

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- As mentioned before, Europol's role is to support EU MS and non-EU partners in their investigations, and to do so in a networked manner, working not only with EU partners but also non-EU partners and international organisations such as UNODC.
- We also produce a number of strategic reports and thematic assessments such as the Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) and the annual Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA).
- Other examples include the joint report with Eurojust on the common judicial and law enforcement challenges in combatting cybercrime, our annual joint Observatory Function report on encryption with Eurojust or our joint assessment of the criminal uses and abuses of AI, together with UNICRI and an industry partner. All these reports can be downloaded from the Europol web site.
- Now I would like to share with you some of the recent operational successes supported by Europol:
- In January this year, Europol together with Eurojust supported an operation following a two-year-long investigation into an organised criminal group producing, smuggling and marketing large volume of drugs from Spain to EU countries.

- In June, Op Trojan Shield was carried out with the FBI, the Dutch National Police and the Swedish Police Authority, in cooperation with the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), 16 other countries and the support of Europol. This was one of the largest and most sophisticated law enforcement operations to date against an encrypted communication platform used by criminals and led to the arrest of 800 criminals
- This followed two previous successful operations against criminal encrypted communications platforms - Encrochat and Sky ECC
- In September, Spain, supported by Europol, coordinated Europe-wide EMPACT joint action days targeting the facilitation of illegal immigration, drug trafficking and trafficking of firearms.
- The operational activities involved 27 countries (17 EU Member States and 10 non-EU countries) and were also supported by Eurojust, Frontex, INTERPOL and other international organisation and led to 330 arrests.
- Finally, we have supported a number of successful takedowns of Darkweb marketplaces selling, among other things, illicit drugs. An example is the takedown of the DarkMarket market in January this year, at the time the world's largest illegal marketplace on the dark web with almost 500 000 users. This was an international operation involving Germany, Australia, Denmark, Moldova, Ukraine, the UK, and the US (DEA, FBI, and IRS).

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I believe these examples but also all the prevention and awareness work that we support demonstrate the importance and the effectiveness of international cooperation.

This brings me to the end of my intervention – thank you very much for your attention.