

EU police agency opens unit to tackle cybercrime

January 11 2013, by Mike Corder



A member of the Cybercrime Center turns on the light in a lab during a media tour at the occasion of the official opening of the Cybercrime Center at Europol headquarters in The Hague, Netherlands, Friday Jan. 11, 2013. The lab is housed in a cage of Faraday and is used amongst others to analyze computer hard disks, mobile phones and smart phones. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

The European Union's police coordination agency opened a new cybercrime unit Friday to combat online offenses from banking fraud to peddling images of child sex abuse.

But as the European Cybercrime Centre, or EC3, formally opened its doors at Europol's Hague headquarters, European Home Affairs Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom conceded it will be playing catch-up with organized crime gangs reveling in a "Golden Age" of cybercrime.

Online criminals, she said, "are ahead of us when it comes to imagination and cooperation."

Europol is fighting back with experts huddled around computer screens in blue-lit "labs," monitoring [internet traffic](#) and able to retrieve data users believe they have deleted from their cell phone or computer hard disks.



Employees of Europol's Cybercrime Center are seen during a media tour at the occasion of the official opening of the Cybercrime Center at Europol headquarters in The Hague, Netherlands, Friday Jan. 11, 2013. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

The agency says online payment card fraud generates an estimated €1.5 billion (\$2 billion) a year, while recent international investigations into pedophiles trafficking child abuse images on the Internet have led to hundreds of arrests worldwide.

Europol expert Valerio Papajorgji said the new center will chase criminals who attempt to conceal their activities in parts of the Internet and online networks not generally accessed by regular users or search engines—known as the "deep web" and "darknet."

It also will track and tackle malicious software used to steal personal and banking information from people's computers and empty their online accounts.

Europol Director Rob Wainwright called the establishment of the center a milestone in Europe's fight against crime and efforts to deny criminals "the cyberspace and opportunity they are currently exploiting to harm governments, businesses and citizens."

The European center aims to cooperate with other such agencies around the world, and Wainwright signed a letter of intent on cooperation with John Morton, director of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, which has a long-established cybercrime unit known as C3.

Morton said cross-border teamwork is key to tackling cybercrime, which knows no borders.

"This level of international cooperation is not just an ideal or something to be wished for but rather a necessity," he said at the opening ceremony in The Hague.

"You literally cannot investigate and prosecute these cases any

more—the large-scale ones—over the Internet without very strong international cooperation."

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