



PRESS RELEASE

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Retailers and road transporters call to fight black markets for stolen goods at European level

Fencing of stolen goods is a serious and growing problem in Europe, at the expense of the European retail and road transport sector. The businesses in these sectors suffer damages amounting to at least € 15 billion annually due to organised crime. The Dutch Retail Association (Detailhandel Nederland), EuroCommerce, the International Road Transport Union (IRU) and UNIZO therefore are in favour of a strong European approach in fighting black markets for stolen goods. Today, at a special event in the European Parliament, they call on the European Commission to present effective measures to step up the fight against fencing at the European level.

Organised criminal groups do not steal primarily for private consumption. Most of the ill-gotten goods are sold on black markets. The groups cash in on stolen merchandise by selling it via fencing operations, such as flea markets, pawn shops, shady bars and restaurants, but also via highly professional warehouses where products are repackaged, and - last but not least - via online market places.

Increasingly, these illicit activities have a cross-border dimension. Criminal gangs are often heading from the east to the west to steal goods in the European Union. Large quantities of merchandise are subsequently transported to the east to be sold. The mobility of these gangs explains why they are dubbed itinerant criminal groups.

“It is clear that fighting this phenomenon effectively will require a European approach. Only if national police and justice organisations cooperate cross-border is there any chance of dealing a serious blow to itinerant groups and the black markets on which they trade stolen goods. For the retail industry effectively fighting fencing is of great importance. Shopkeepers are twice victim of these criminal groups. A huge number of products is stolen out of their shops and subsequently they lose turnover because the stolen articles find their way to the consumer via black markets, instead of that the consumer buys them in their shop”, says Patricia Hoogstraaten, chair of the Europe Committee of the Dutch Retail Association and member of the Steering Committee of EuroCommerce.

“In the fight against cargo theft and the corresponding black markets for stolen goods all efforts have to be pulled out”, says Michael Nielsen, General Delegate of the Permanent Delegation of the International Road Transport Union (IRU) to the European Union. “As long as

there is an easily accessible market for stolen goods, these goods will remain a much-wanted target for criminal gangs. Making access to black markets more difficult will also have an important preventive effect. It is obvious that if there were no black markets for stolen goods, criminals would not be able to sell easily stolen goods, leaving little incentive to steal them in the first place – something that would have great positive effects for the road haulage market in Europe that suffer tremendously on a daily basis from cargo theft and attack on drivers.”

“Fighting fencing on a cross-border basis is still relatively rare in the European Union”, says Luc Ardies, director retail of UNIZO, the Flemish association for independent businesses. “Europol is more active in fields like fighting terrorism, human trafficking and drugs. At the level of the Council of Member States it is up to now only an emerging issue. In Belgium the number of thefts out of shops has risen with 25% over the last five years. This mainly as a result of the opening up of borders in the European Union and itinerant groups of offenders. Due to increased attention of the Belgium police and justice forces for itinerant criminals, the rise in number of offences has slowed down last year. But to more effectively fight itinerant crime groups, strong European police and justice cooperation is necessary. Eradicating fencing markets is thereby a priority. Otherwise it remains fighting a losing battle.”

To step up the fight against black markets for stolen goods, the European retail and road transport industry urge the European Commission to propose the establishment of a European Prosecutor’s Office to combat fencing. The European Commission should also with respect to the upcoming revision of the e-commerce propose strict monitoring obligations for online marketplaces to identify and ban fishy trades. Further, it is strongly recommendable that the traceability of much stolen goods is improved and that more anti-fencing collaboration is forged between private and public partners at the European level.

The event on fighting black markets for stolen goods in the European Union will be held in the European Parliament in Brussels in Room A1E3 from 12:00h to 13:00h on the 7th of December 2011.

The position paper can be downloaded [here](#)

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