



External contribution: Presentation DJSOC/i2 in the fight against human trafficking: supporting role in internet and social media investigations

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The Internet Investigation Unit of the Directorate of Serious and Organised Crime - **DJSOC/i2** was set up as part of the optimisation of the services of the Federal Police (2014) and was extended with the 'Kanaalplan' (Canal Plan).²⁷⁴

In July 2015, the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council, composed of the Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs of all EU Member States, decided to set up a new unit within Europol: the EU-IRU (*Internet Referral Unit*). The activities of this unit are as follows:

- The coordination of searches on the internet for content related to terrorism, violent radicalism and human trafficking and smuggling, and the coordination of its removal.
- Operational support to national units;
- Strategic analysis and assistance in prevention;
- Coordination and awareness-raising in the area of R&D (Research and Development);

Since January 2016, on the initiative of the Minister for Home Affairs, the BE-IRU unit has been part of DJSOC/i2, which is now called **DJSOC/i2-IRU**. As part of the operationalisation of the 'Canal Plan', the Minister for

Home Affairs decided to increase staff within the service in February 2016.

In November 2016, the Ministries of Justice and Home Affairs officially designated the **i2/BE-IRU** service as the Reference Unit and single national and international contact point for the removal of hate content - 'Hate Speech - Hate Crime' - on the internet, but also other illegal content, covering all phenomena, including human trafficking.

The service currently consists of 21 persons: A Commissioner - Head of Department, Chief Inspector and 19 inspectors. Via Mobility, new staff will shortly reinforce the team. The aim is to recruit 33 members of staff in total.

The responsibilities of the **DJSOC/i2-IRU** unit in the area of terrorism are to search the internet, transmit reports to the relevant units, submit proposals for the removal of content to Europol, which along with the OTT Providers, acts as a contact point. These tasks are carried out on the basis of cumulative criteria defined by the Plan R - Radicalism:

- The entity minimises and/or justifies the use of coercion or force;
- The entity disseminates its own objectives to third parties through specific operations or channels (propaganda).
- The entity poses a threat to democracy and/or seeks to destroy or dismantle the democratic system.

For all kinds of hate messages (racist, homophobic, xenophobic, religious or sexual remarks) the **IRU** either searches the internet autonomously, or receives elements from various sources (integrated police services, the magistrates, UNIA, national or international partners, etc.). The investigative work focuses mainly on content related to Belgium.

Once the evidence has been established and recorded, the unit identifies the author - if necessary, the magistrates are called upon - and draws up an official report against him. As a reference unit, it also requests the providers directly to remove the content, based on non-compliance with the Code of Conduct.

When searching the Internet, the **i2/BE-IRU** unit also provides support to the investigation units in the context of judicial orders, in particular to the entities responsible for the cases falling under the National Security Plan (NSP), including human trafficking and smuggling, to carry out investigative work for online and freely-available content.

²⁷⁴ The 'Canal Plan' is the action plan against: "radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism in the canal zone" and comprises seven municipalities in Brussels, the territory of Laeken (the Brussels-City entity), Sint-Gillis, Anderlecht, Molenbeek, Koekelberg, Sint-Joost and Schaerbeek, and Vilvoorde in the outskirts. Among other things, this plan envisages the strengthening of the police forces in this area, and includes a section for the investigation and identification of associations through which propaganda is disseminated and/or which are responsible for the recruitment and shadow financing of these associations and of hate preachers.

The **i2/BE-IRU** unit does not operate autonomously and only operates when requested. In this context, the unit actively participated in the investigation following the attacks in Zaventem and Brussels.

With regards to human trafficking, the unit has already been called upon to investigate possible instances of sexual exploitation. Our services do not always have to intervene in critical situations, in which a person may be exploited. Sometimes the investigative work carried out can help resolve certain cases. A concrete example where the service has provided assistance is the following:

The service was called in for the case of a minor from an EU country who was suspected of having travelled through Belgium before being forced into the Belgian prostitution milieu. We were asked to find traces of her stay in Belgium, to check whether the person in question had stayed in Belgium voluntarily and what she had done here. As such, we were able to identify two men, and move the investigation forward.

The open source investigation consisted of analysing the data available on various social media: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

In the case of minors, the investigation revealed the following elements:

a) Facebook

- She has a public Facebook account in her name, and has 1,781 friends;
- In Belgium there was a link, with the Facebook page of a nightclub which she had 'liked';
- The photos, likes and comments on her Facebook account were investigated, but nothing alarming was found;
- Via Facebook, no link could be established between this minor and the two men.

b) Instagram

- Her Facebook account showed that she also had an Instagram account;
- After a check, we were able to establish that she did indeed have an Instagram account, which was also public;
- She has 12 photos and 744 followers on this account. She follows 1,272 other Instagram accounts herself;
- One of her followers is one of the two men (P.) involved, who also has an Instagram account himself;
- However, no link could be established between his Instagram account and that of the other man (V.).

As regards the first man (P.), the investigation revealed the following elements:

a) Facebook

- He has a public Facebook account in his name, and has 152 friends;
- He has many contacts with the other man (V.);
- After examining the photos and pages which he "liked", two nightclubs of a sexual nature were identified.

b) Instagram

- Via the minor's Instagram account, 'P' could be identified as one of her followers. He himself has an Instagram account in his name;
- He has 346 photos and 334 followers on this account. He follows 281 other Instagram accounts himself;
- His account contains a link to one of the nightclubs with a sexual nature on his Facebook page. Given the number of hashtags, he appears to be very active in terms of this nightclub, which is located in an EU country. Moreover, it appears that he has recently been in the country in question;
- His account also contains various photos showing him with large sums of money and drugs, as well as confirmation that he purchased two new mobile phones for an amount of €2,258.

As regards the second man (V.), the investigation revealed the following elements:

a) Facebook

- He has a Facebook account in his name, and has 110 friends, including the other man (P.);
- He is not friends with the underage girl;
- He is often tagged on the photographs of a Belgian company specialising in graphic design;
- He is tagged on a photo of the first man (P.): it is the same photo as the one which appears on the Instagram account of P., during the purchase of the two mobile phones;
- The investigation into this man's profile did not reveal anything suspicious.

b) Instagram

- He has an Instagram account. However, it is apparently a private account;
- Nonetheless, we can see that he has placed 60 posts/photographs on it, that he has 38 followers and that he

follows 688 people.

c) Twitter

- He has a Twitter account, but his last tweet dates from 2014.

d) LinkedIn

- Subsequent investigation shows that this man also has a LinkedIn profile, in which he presents himself as a businessman.

The results of these analyses have been passed on to the relevant departments for further investigation.

In the area of human trafficking, our service therefore supports the services that call on us for a particular aspect of an investigation, namely investigative work and analysis on the internet.