

Spain and Europol arrest one of Europe's biggest money launderers



**The police raid was led by Spain's Guardia Civil and coordinated by Europol
[Screengrab/Reuters]**

Madrid, September 15 (RHC)-- Police have arrested “one of Europe's biggest money launderers” after a raid in southern Spain, saying the British-Irish suspect is believed to have shifted more than 200 million euros (\$200 million) in illicit cash.

The operation led by Spain's Guardia Civil and coordinated by Europol is seen as a significant blow against the notorious Kinahan organised crime group, which United States law officials have called “a

threat to the entire licit economy.”

The chief suspect in the case was detained on Monday “as a result of an international law enforcement operation led by the Spanish Guardia Civil”, Europol said. “Two of his associates were also arrested in Spain, and one in the United Kingdom,” Europol said in a statement on Thursday.

Europol did not name the suspect, but a source close to the investigation and Irish newspapers said he was John Francis Morrissey, 62, a known associate of the Kinahan gang. Based out of Dubai, the Kinahan crime group – led among others by Irishman Daniel Kinahan – “smuggles deadly narcotics, including cocaine, to Europe, and is a threat to the entire licit economy through its role in international money laundering”, US Treasury Department Under Secretary Brian E Nelson said.

Morrissey peddled a brand of vodka along Spain’s tourist-heavy Costa del Sol, allegedly to disguise his white-washing activities, law officials said. He also worked as an enforcer for the Kinahan cartel and helped with drug shipments from South America. “[Morrissey] and his associates were in charge of collecting large amounts of cash from criminal organisations, which they would then ‘deliver’ to other criminal organisations in other countries,” said Europol.

Using the so-called hawala underground banking system, which works on the basis of face-to-face transactions, “it is believed that the suspects have laundered over 200 million euros using this method,” Europol said. Morrissey “is one of our high-value targets”, Europol spokeswoman Claire Georges told the AFP news agency. “His arrest followed a complex investigation,” she said.

The probe was led by the Spanish Guardia Civil, who worked with the British National Crime Agency, Dutch police, the Irish Garda and Europol, which coordinated the international operation. Earlier this year, the US Treasury Department sanctioned the Kinahan crime family, as well as Morrissey and several other alleged associates of the group.

Morrissey was “designated for materially assisting, sponsoring, or providing financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, the Kinahan group”, the US Treasury Department said in April.

Employed as a “brand ambassador” for Nero Drinks, a British-based company that makes a premium vodka, Morrissey was “heavily invested in the company”, it added.

However, Morrissey has given “a significant portion of the business to Daniel Kinahan to compensate for loads of drugs seized by law enforcement”, the US Treasury Department said. “The main members of the organisation in Spain had created a brand of vodka promoted in nightclubs and restaurants in the Costa del Sol to disguise the source of their earnings,” said Europol.

“One of the suspects arrested ran a car dealership and was in charge of providing vehicles to the criminal organisation in which he had built concealed compartments to transport the large amounts of cash undetected,” Europol added.

Monday’s arrests indeed came after Spanish police opened a probe early last year after seizing 200kg (440lbs) of cocaine and 500,000 euros (\$500,000) in cash, stashed in hidden compartments in vehicles used by the gang. “The case was rapidly brought to Europol due to its international nature,” the agency said.

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