European Police Arrest 42 After Cracking Covert App



European police arrested 42 suspects and seized guns, drugs and millions in cash, after cracking another encrypted online messaging service used by criminals, Dutch law enforcement said Friday.

Police launched raids on 79 premises in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands following an investigation that started back in September 2020 and led to the shutting down of the covert Exclu Messenger service.

Exclu is just the latest encrypted online chat service to be unlocked by law enforcement. In 2021 investigators broke into Sky ECC – another “secure” app used by criminal gangs.

After police and prosecutors got into the Exclu secret communications system, they were able to read the messages passed between criminals for five months before the raids, said Dutch police.

“Those arrested include users of the app, as well as its owners and controllers,” their statement added.

Police in France, Italy and Sweden, as well as Europol and Eurojust, its justice agency twin, also took part in the investigation.

The police raids uncovered at least two drugs labs, one cocaine-processing facility, several kilogrammes of drugs, four million euros ($4.3 million) in cash, luxury goods and guns, Dutch police said.

Used by around 3,000 people, including around 750 Dutch speakers, Exclu was installed on smartphones with a licence to operate costing 800 euros for six months.

“Exclu made it possible to exchange messages, photos, notes, voice memos, chat conversations and videos with other users,” Dutch police said.

The online service “was praised by the owners and manager for its high level of security”, police added.

The earlier Sky ECC probe gave investigators a vast trove of messages sent between secretive drug smuggling gangs.

Breaking that encrypted system allowed police to intercept drug shipments and make a large number of arrests.

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