

# **100 years of Interpol: No reason to celebrate**

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The general assembly of the “International Criminal Police Organization” (Interpol) with 195 member states is supposed to take place at the end of November/beginning of December for its 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The event is rumoured to happen from the 28<sup>th</sup> of November until the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December. The guest list names hundreds of police chiefs and heads of governments. Goal of the conference is the improvement of the efficiency in fighting international crime and terrorism, as well as universal global quality standards.

The choice of the venue is no coincidence; Following several inconclusive conferences like the “International Conference of Rome for the Social Defense Against Anarchists” in 1898, the follow-up in 1904 in St. Petersburg, as well as the “First International Criminal Police Congress” in Monaco 1914, another conference took place in September 1923 following the initiative of Viennas chief of police Johann Schober. The conference concluded with the founding of the International Criminal Police Commission (ICPC), direct predecessor of today’s Interpol, with Johann Schober as its president. As Viennese police president he forced reforms towards a “modernisation” of investigation methods and information exchange systems, making the Austrian police internationally renowned. He established an intelligence service that compiled a register of persons as well as indexes through surveillance and informants. The focus was not only set on general criminality but with regards to the political active, like anarchists, communists and social revolutionaries. Regarding the personnel, he worked towards removing social democrats from the agency and employed antimarxists and later nazis.

In 1938 the ICPCs leadership was taken over by the National Socialists and its headquarter was moved to Berlin-Wannsee, where it shared its rooms and lead with the Gestapo. The ICPCs records, that were transferred to Berlin, like the so called “Internationales Zigeunerregistratur (international gypsy registry)”, as well as the records concerning counterfeiting of money and passports, helped the National Socialists prosecuting certain groups and in their mass production of counterfeit money and fake passports in the KZ Sachsenhausen.

The ICPC was dissolved in 1945 but newly formed as the International Criminal Police Organization, Interpol – probably also to distance itself from the ICPC of the inter- and poastwar period. However, certain continuities are observable in its 100 year history, even though it was probably only a coincidence that in 1968 Paul Dickopf, a sworn SS-policeman, was elected president and the prosecution of nazi criminals not before the 1980s started...

Interpol, as it exists today, is, contrary to the popular medial representations, no supra-national police agency with the authority to arrest, but more an association that functions as network of law enforcement agencies of its member states. As organisation it offers administrative support in the fields of communication and data banks/information exchange, as well as support in investigations, expertise, and trainings for the various law enforcement agencies. Interpol is, according to own statements, active in three fields: terrorism, organised crime, and cybercrime. Its broad mandate covers, technically, every crime-related field, though: from crimes against humanity through child pornography, drug trafficking and production, infringement of intellectual property to economic crime. Besides its headquarters in Lyon, France, and seven regional bureaus, the organisation has bureaus in each of the 195 member states with more than 1000 employees, making her the largest police organisation. The budget of 140 million euros is comprised of the member states’ contributions and, additionally, seperate contributions from EU, several repression agencies of the member states (FBI) and the Interpol Foundation. But Interpol also receives donations from NGOs, the private sector (Philipp Morris, FIFA, IOC, Quatar 2022, etc.) and other international organisations (UNICEF, FRONTEX, etc.). One of the

organisations central tasks is the maintenance of 19 data banks, that contain entries on missing and wanted persons, fingerprints, DNA samples, and stolen (travel) documents. According to its own accounts, the data banks contain 125 million police files that are queried 187 times per second. In 2022 alone this results in 5.9 billion queries with 1.4 million hits. In Austria 32 mio wanted person searches were queried through, or for, Interpol in 2020, additionally there were 900.000 car inquiries, as well as 7.4 million inquiries on stolen documents.

The other main task of Interpol is the publication of “Notices”: warnings to its member states about missing or wanted persons. The most prominent one is the “Red Notice”, a notice that indicates that a member state wants to make an arrest on a certain person. The member states are not obliged to follow these notices but often treat them as arrest and extradition warrant. “Diffusions” that can be issued with smaller bureaucratic effort, are another popular means of asking for the making of arrests.

## Concrete projects

All projects of Interpol deal with data collection and storage, plus making the data as fast as possible to retrieve and compare for cops all over the world. The project “Silk Road”, for example, ended up in identifying 270 people involved in “organised immigration crime” and subsequently in the arrests of a large share. How quickly those assisting migration efforts could be prosecuted, with its goal of preventing migration movements altogether, should be clear to all of us.

With project “Roxanne”, law enforcement agencies in the EU are supposed to receive a powerful surveillance tool. The system is supposed to recognize persons in phone calls on the basis of their voice. It also uses traces that suspects leave in public spaces or the internet.

The European Commission develops a procedure for the identification on the basis of the spoken word. The platform “Roxanne” is supposed to compute large amounts of data and for that combines audio files with other information on a person. To investigate networks of suspects, the platform is able to examine videos via facial recognition. These videos stem from public surveillance cameras or are downloaded via YouTube or Facebook.

With this project the Commission aims at improving investigative skills of law enforcement agencies, especially in major crime cases. 24 European Organisations from 16 states take part in “Roxanne”, half of them are law enforcement agencies and Ministries of the Interior. In Germany the Universities of Saarland and Hannover are involved. Israel, as only third country, posts an expert on public security to the EU project. Furthermore, the consortium includes Interpol and the company Airbus.

The technology is supposed to be employed for so-called wiretapping through which phone calls are surveilled. The purpose is the search for specific participants in a call. But also VoIP-Calls, e.g. through messengers like WhatsApp, are supposed to be tapped via “Roxanne”. With the “Speaker Identification Integrated Project” (SIIP) the EU already financed another similar procedure for the identification of “criminals and terrorists” on basis of their voice in 2018. Just as now, Interpol, the German BKA (Federal Criminal Police Office) and Airbus were involved.

With “Roxanne”, the analysis based on speech biometrics are supposed to be supplemented with other characteristics. For that, all information, that can be collected in police investigations, will be processed. Because it is assumed that suspects regularly use prepaid SIM cards, “Roxanne” aims to identify the respective person based on earlier used phone and IMEI-numbers, as

well as geodata and timestamps. Additionally, contents from earlier tapped phone calls will be used for comparison in order to acquire similar sounding phrases for the improvement of the identification of sought the after speakers. Audio files will be turned into text via speech-to-text software. From that metadata will be extracted, e.g. locations, persons, and companies. Even the analysis of multilingual audio files is supposed to be possible. If it is known that certain participants only rarely speak up, this characteristic can be specifically searched for. The software is also supposed to automatically determine the age, gender and accent of the participants in the conversation. This is supposed to help narrowing down the looked for speech signals on certain persons. As another metadata, the “favourite car” is named, that could be identified through the cars sounds during a phone call. This way the finding of suspects with changing phone numbers could be facilitated.

In April 2019 the 2-year project DTECH was initiated. It processes photos and videos from social media. Interpol receives the data through official means, states the German Ministry of the Interior. Accordingly, DTECH is based on facial images, that are provided by “national agencies, regional monitoring platforms, industry and commercial OSINT”. They are then stored by Interpol. DTECH is used for the identification of persons. According to the (german) government, unknown individuals will be matched with “nominal data” (person data, passport numbers, etc.). It is yet unclear with which reference data at Interpol the via DTECH obtained faces will be matched. This would be possible in project “Facial, Imaging, Recognition, Searching and Tracking” (FIRST) through which unknown terrorism suspects are supposed to be identified.

Interpol is also creating a database named “Criminal Information System” (CIS). It contains images provided in manhunts in member states which are available to Interpol anyways. They are checked for their suitability in facial recognition and subsequently stored in a “facial recognition database”. This database contained 54.000 person files with searchable photo.

## **Transnational repression**

Arguably the most important instrument for repression by Interpol is the sending out of so-called “Notices”. These are calls for support requested for by Interpol member states and subsequently being sent out to law enforcement agencies globally. These Notices are divided into colours depending on their respective purpose. A Black Notice is a call for support in finding or identifying a body, while a Blue Notice is a request for information regarding the whereabouts of an individual. The by far most frequent Notices are Red Notices, i.e. the request for information of whereabouts and the arrest with subsequent extradition of a person.

These Red Notices are very popular in autocracies like Turkey, China, Russia and some of the Arab states as tool for the international persecution and repression of dissidents or other politically persecuted individuals. The perfidious thing here is that affected are not informed about their international branding, or can only lose them after long-lasting and expensive juridical processes. The president of the Uighur World Congress, now living in Germany, was searched for, by these means, for 21 years after China issued such a warrant.

When branded with a Red Notice, people do not only have to live in fear of repression by the original persecuting state but also in fear of the cops of the other 194 member states. Apart from the ever present danger of being arbitrarily arrested and extradited, it can impossible for affected individuals to open bank accounts, move across borders or find a job. Red Notices are thus not

only issued as means of political persecution and extradition, for some states it is simply enough to make the life of dissidents abroad as hard as possible.

According to the Interpol statutes, Red Notices cannot be issued out of political or religious reasons but it is only since very recently that requests – though, of course, by Interpol itself and only lapidary – are being controlled; though, rather, such a control can be easily circumvented by issuing the Notice on a wrong warrant. This happened to the nephew of the former opposition leader Fethullah Gülen. He was arrested and extradited from Kenya to Turkey on basis of a fake warrant for child abuse, in Turkey, however, he was wrongly convicted for being part of a terrorist organization for which he is still serving time in Turkish prison.

The Bahraini dissident and human rights activist Ahmed Jafaar Muhammad Ali was, on his flight from Bahraini authorities, extradited from his Serbian exile on base of a Red Notice from Interpol, deported to Bahrain's capital Manama where he was directly turned over to the local repression agencies. This happened despite intervention by the European Court of Justice and its demand towards the Serbian state to annul the undertaking, since Muhammad was facing possible torture and execution in Bahrain for his political work. He actually was even held captive and tortured prior to his flight for taking part in anti-government protests. In his absence he was sentenced for life. In 2017 two of his co-convicts were, after two years of inhumane captivity, executed by the Bahraini state. All this was known to Interpol and the Serbian authorities, yet neither were the extradition cancelled nor the Red Notice at Interpol annulled.

Interpol thus becomes a tool of repression by autocracies and dictatorships, and supposedly “democratic” states their henchmen. This transnational contempt for mankind puts a spotlight on the fact that no single state, may it be ever so “democratically legitimized” or appeal ever so much to respecting human rights, can be trusted. As long as this world is trashed with an internationally connected body of pigs, the politically or religiously persecuted or individuals persecuted for their race, have nowhere to be safe. Let's not put up with this any longer! It cannot be that murderous repression is carried out by supposedly democratic states under the cover of international security, or that our data can always and globally be queried by cops and used against us, while we are watching.

Let's take the cop-conference as reason for actions against Interpol, the police state and any other agency of repression; their representatives are everywhere, after all.

**Against prison society and its accomplices!**

**Against blanket coverage and repression!**

**Against any authoritarianism and state!**

**For freedom!**

**For life!**

**For Anarchy!**

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