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27th CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN MINISTERS OF JUSTICE

Yerevan (12-13 October 2006)

**VICTIMS:
PLACE, RIGHTS AND ASSISTANCE**

Report presented by the Ministry of Justice of

UNITED KINGDOM

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REDUCING MOBILE PHONE THEFT IN EUROPE

THE PROBLEM

In the UK it is clear that mobile phones are a significant factor in many offences of robbery and theft. Studies suggest that mobile phones are stolen in around half of all robberies and are the only item taken in around 20% of incidents. Young people, especially those of school age, are proportionately more likely to be victims of this type of crime. It is likely that mobile phone crime is increasingly becoming a problem in many other European countries too. The UK police have been contacted by numerous European countries including Poland, Germany, Portugal, France and the Netherlands regarding best practice in tackling mobile phone crime.

The approach in the UK, in conjunction with the GSM Association, has been to remove the market for stolen phones, by ensuring that stolen mobiles are blocked and no longer work on UK networks. Many of the handsets that are stolen in the UK, however, are now being trafficked to certain other European countries where they are sold on the black market. It is clear that effective action needs to be taken across Europe to close down these illegal markets.

CURRENT ACTIONS IN UK

In the UK over the last three years, the Government, police and industry have been working together to tackle escalating mobile phone theft and have put in place a range of measures. These include:

- Setting up a **national database of stolen phones** that enables phones, once reported as stolen, to be barred across all UK networks. Performance targets and testing procedures have been agreed and published in a mobile phone crime reduction charter.
- Passing the **Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Act 2002**. The phone barring process will not work if it is possible to re-programme stolen mobiles to change their identity. This legislation makes it an offence to tamper with a mobile phone handset's identity (IMEI).
- The creation of the **National Mobile Phone Crime Unit**. This national unit acts as an intelligence gathering body as well as a national centre of excellence advising police forces on measures to tackle mobile phone crime.
- Numerous public awareness **campaigns** have been mounted, to educate mobile phone users who are the potential victims and deter potential offenders. These have focused particularly on young people.

This approach has been very successful, contributing to overall reductions in robbery in England and Wales since 2003.

CURRENT SITUATION IN EUROPE

The UK's experience suggests that three types of action are needed to close down the market for stolen mobile phones.

- 1. The network operators** need to be able to recognise and block stolen mobiles across all networks. To do this, networks need to have in place, and implement, their own Equipment Identity Registers (EIRs). The Global System for Mobile Telecommunications (GSM) Association has issued a directive that all GSM networks should have EIR technology installed to enable the blocking of devices to be done via the IMEI. Some networks in Europe have done this but others have yet to do so.
- 2. Mobile phone Manufacturers** need to ensure that it is as difficult as possible for criminals to tamper with IMEIs on handsets. The manufacturers seem to have performed well in this area. There is an EU agreement with the mobile manufacturers under the Telecommunications Conformity Assessment and Market Surveillance Committee (TCAM) to improve the security of handsets and thus make it harder for thieves to change their identity (IMEI). The minimum standards are self regulated effectively and are well applied.
- 3. Governments** should be encouraged to legislate to make reprogramming, or offering to reprogramme mobile phones an illegal activity. So far, the UK France and Lithuania have put in place such legislation and we understand that the Czech Republic regulator has action in hand to address this issue.

THE WAY FORWARD

We propose that the Council of Europe should examine the possibility of establishing a multi-disciplinary committee under the oversight of the CDPC with the task of drawing up an instrument on the issue of mobile phone crime. The UK considers that such an instrument should recommend at least the following three areas for action in each member state:

- Mobile phone network operators need to follow the directive issued by the GSM Association to develop and implement their own Equipment Identity Registers (EIRs), providing the building blocks for a global blocking system.
- Legislation. Member states should be encouraged to make it an offence to tamper with, or agree to tamper with, a mobile handset's identity (IMEI).
- Greater international co-operation between law enforcement agencies is needed to disrupt the supply chains, including setting up a dedicated national Single Point of Contact in police forces for mobile phone crime. This would result in more effective sharing of intelligence, together with development of best practice in respect of intelligence, enforcement and prevention.

