

EUROSPARKS SEMINAR: BRUSSELS, JAN 24TH 2008

On 24th January, the EUROSPARKS research project presented the results of their twelve month long investigation into a problem which has been faced by European judiciaries for some time. That is, the difficulty of trans-national cooperation in the enforcement of minor traffic offences committed by foreign drivers.

The EUROSPARKS project is an offshoot of the UK based SPARKS programme, which was initiated to tackle the problem of foreign drivers committing traffic violations, and yet escaping prosecution because of the foreign registration of their vehicle. The EUROSPARKS project was designed to address this problem across Europe as a whole, and to coordinate a consistent response across EU member states.

EUROSPARKS is co-funded by the European Commission's Civil Justice Framework Programme (from the Civil Justice unit within Director General Justice, Freedom and Security) and London's Enforcement Taskforce.

In order to gain a better understanding of the situation across Europe, EUROSPARKS conducted research on traffic violation in selected member states, only to discover that other countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Malta face similar problems to the UK. Each country in the EU has, according to the EUROSPARKS report, different methods of dealing with minor traffic violations, and as a result, offences in different states are categorised variously as 'civil', 'criminal' or 'administrative'. This in turn creates ambiguity over the nature of the offence and the appropriate form of penalty across national borders.

The EUROSPARKS report not only comments on the nature of the problems faced, but also draws attention to potential solutions which it hopes to present to DG Transport and DG Justice in the European Commission in due course. Their framework is designed to be implemented by 2012, in time for the London Olympics, and places particular stress on making foreign vehicle registration data more easily and widely available trans-nationally, to enable prosecution or penalisation for foreign offenders. It is hoped by the Eurosparks team that their recommendations will influence the forthcoming Commission proposal on Road Safety, in order to address the problems to which, as yet, no clear solution has been found.