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Europol Uncovers Russian Money Laundering Group in Football

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Portuguese police, supported by Europol, have arrested three members of a Russian organized crime network suspected of laundering money through European football clubs.

A press release from the European Union's law enforcement agency said that the group was directly responsible for laundering several million euros across several EU countries since 2008.

Investigators allege that the group targeted football clubs with financial problems and infiltrated them using generous benefactors. They later purchased the clubs via networks of companies registered offshore, which allowed the real owners and the origin of the funds to remain unidentified.

Once the clubs were purchased, they were used to launder dirty money through television rights deals, gambling, and by under or overvaluing players. Police also believe that teams could have been involved in match-fixing.

The suspects enjoyed lavish lifestyles while importing large amounts of cash from Russia to

Portugal using offshore shell companies, Europol reported. They claim to have “significant evidence” proving the group's involvement in money laundering, tax fraud, corruption and documents forgery.

The year-long operation has involved more than 70 Portuguese police officers and raids of 22 houses and companies, including four football clubs.

Police also uncovered links to similar serious organized crimes in Austria, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Moldova and Britain.

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