

Encrypted chat data leads to major drug raids in Germany

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In this June 8, 2021 taken photo a police officer guard a house in Leverkusen, Germany, Tuesday, June 8, 2021. Special police units searched buildings in connection with money laundering and organized crime. German security officials said Tuesday they made more than 750 arrests and seized large amounts of drugs after gaining access to extensive chat data of encrypted cellphones. Credit: Marcel Kusch/dpa via AP

German security officials said Tuesday they made more than 750 arrests and seized large amounts of drugs after gaining access to extensive chat data of encrypted cellphones.

The focus of the investigation, which started in April 2020, was on data from users of the provider EncroChat who were involved in the illegal drug trade, Frankfurt prosecutors and the country's Federal Crime Police Office said in a written statement.

Dutch and French officials helped with the investigation, prosecutors said.

"The EncroChat data was obtained in the context of a French investigation," Frankfurt prosecutor Julia Bussweiler told The Associated Press. "The French authorities, together with the Dutch authorities, set up a so-called joint investigation team and within this investigation team they managed to decrypt the encrypted data and thus read the communication between the users of the Enchrochat mobile phones."

Investigators seized 3.2 metric tons (3.5 short tons) of cannabis, about 320 kilograms (700 pounds) of synthetic drugs, more than 125,500 ecstasy pills, almost 400 kilograms (880 pounds) of cocaine and 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of heroin, authorities said.

They also confiscated 310 weapons, more than 12,200 rounds of ammunition and assets worth 168 million euros (\$223 million).

Prosecutor Bussweiler said the investigation was far from over and they were still sifting through and evaluating the seized data.

"There are many people who are in pretrial detention," she said. "The data is being checked to see whether it is sufficient for an indictment."

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