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**On the Scent Trail**

*By Alexandra George, EULEX Customs Spokesperson*

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Roxxy leapt aboard the bus heading for Serbia after its passengers had stepped down and began sniffing in every nook and cranny – under the seats, in the racks overhead, in the luggage compartment. If drugs were stashed away somewhere Roxxy and her handler would have found them.

Roxxy, a 4-year old Malinois from the EULEX Special Police Department K9 unit, is trained in protection and detecting narcotics. On 24 June she and her K9 unit colleague, police dog Blackie, a 6-year old English Springer Spaniel, trained in finding explosives, took part in Operation Cash Watch at Merdare border/boundary point (with Serbia).

Operation Cash Watch began in early February 2010 and focused mainly on outgoing flights to Europe at Pristina airport. It has been led by Kosovo Customs, supported by EULEX Customs and EULEX Police components. The operation at Merdare on 24 June was the second day of its extension to Kosovo’s border/ boundary crossing points.

Operation Cash Watch took place 1 or 2 days a week over several weeks and targeted potential money launderers and money couriers suspected of moving large amounts of cash out of Kosovo.

That day at Merdare the joint cooperation between the different services was in evidence: a Kosovo Custom Flexible Anti Smuggling Team (FAST), supported by the EULEX Customs monitoring unit and EULEX Police K9 unit. FAST team members checked outbound and inbound traffic using a list given to KC by FYROM Customs at Hani Elezit listing individuals and around 10 companies who declared money upon entering FYROM at Hani Elezit, but not a few minutes before when leaving Kosovo.

Roxxy and Blackie’s vehicle searches at Merdare provided additional back-up in the quest to detect undeclared money handled by criminals dealing in drugs and/or explosives. As Brian Richard, Deputy Head, EULEX Customs, explains: “The fact is that molecules (from humans) that have been in touch with drugs and/or explosives, for example, when criminals exchange cash for narcotics sales, can be traced up to several months afterwards. Thus Roxxy and Blackie are another ‘tool’ for detecting hidden money, especially as trained cash dogs are not available.”

Blackie, with her panda look -- black ears and black eye patches set against a white coat with speckled black markings, -- is intrepid in his sniffing over the various surfaces of a huge metal truck, moving his nose under the chassis, around the wheels, guided by his handler from the Finnish Police. If explosives were concealed Blackie would have sniffed them out for sure.

The English Springer Spaniel is used by many local UK police forces as drugs/explosives dogs, the Malinois more by continental European police services.

Roxxy’s handler is from Latvia and he worked for 16 years with 7 dogs in the Border Police K9 unit patrolling his country’s border with Russia, Belarus and Lithuania searching for heroin, cocaine and amphetamines. Blackie and his handler go “wherever police duties take us in Finland.”

Blackie’s and Roxxy’s hard work and instincts impressed FAST team leader Benan Brestovci: “During Operation Cash Watch we had excellent cooperation with EULEX Customs and Police. We learned new things regarding better and smarter controls. The EULEX Police K9 unit has proven to be very successful in detecting and preventing various types of smuggling during various stints.”

Now that Operation Cash Watch is over, according to Graham Main, Head, EULEX Customs mobile unit: “The main aim of this operation is for Kosovo Customs to integrate this exercise into their normal work operations. It should not be a special undertaking.”

Establishing a K9 unit at Kosovo Customs, as EULEX Customs has proposed, would be a good way to follow hard on the criminal’s trail.

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| **Other Photos:** |  |  | | |
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