



EUROPEAN ANTI-FRAUD OFFICE

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All hands on deck – OLAF helps national authorities seize 100 million cigarettes

With the advent of warmer weather, many Europeans are spending their weekends at the seaside, enjoying the sun rays and the sight of ships sailing into Europe's ports. European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) investigators are also keeping a close eye on vessels passing through these harbours, albeit for different reasons – in the past four months, thanks to information gathered by OLAF, 100 million cigarettes were seized in eight operations throughout different Member States, mainly in seaports.

The most significant seizures took place in Greece and Spain. Working in close cooperation with OLAF and with the Greek General Secretariat Against Corruption (AFCOS Greece), Greek Customs seized 50 million cigarettes in the port of Piraeus throughout March and April. Meanwhile, OLAF information led to the successful seizure of 22 million contraband cigarettes by the Spanish Customs in Barcelona and Malaga in February. In the latter case, the cigarettes were fraudulently misdescribed as commodities such as coconut fibre or travel bags. Overall, seized cigarettes are mostly American Legend, Raquel, JIM and Manchester.

However, not all smuggled cigarettes find their way into Europe by sea. Around 11 million cigarettes were confiscated in the latest Joint Customs Operation (JCO), coordinated by OLAF and the Estonian Customs Administration. [JCO Magnum](#), a regional operation involving Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, particularly targeted tobacco products smuggled by road into the European Union from third countries such as Belarus, Ukraine and Russia.

Furthermore, the cooperation between OLAF and Member States led to the identification of more than 80 trafficked cigarette couriers at several European airports.

Background:

Cigarette smuggling causes huge yearly losses to Member States and the EU in evaded customs duties and taxes. Smuggled tobacco respects no rules, and poses great risks to both consumers and businesses. It undermines anti-smoking and public health campaigns, and violates the strict rules that the EU and Member States have on manufacturing, distribution and sale. OLAF investigates cases of customs fraud as they are financially damaging to legitimate industry and the EU taxpayer. OLAF has an explicit mandate to fight cigarette smuggling as part of the EU efforts to curb this phenomenon.

OLAF mission, mandate and competences

OLAF's mission is to detect, investigate and stop fraud with EU funds.

OLAF fulfils its mission by:

- carrying out independent investigations into fraud and corruption involving EU funds, so as to ensure that all EU taxpayers' money reaches projects that can create jobs and growth in Europe;
- contributing to strengthening citizens' trust in the EU Institutions by investigating serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU Institutions;
- developing a sound EU anti-fraud policy.

In its independent investigative function, OLAF can investigate matters relating to fraud, corruption and other offences affecting the EU financial interests concerning:

- all EU expenditure: the main spending categories are Structural Funds, agricultural policy and rural development funds, direct expenditure and external aid;
- some areas of EU revenue, mainly customs duties;
- suspicions of serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU institutions.

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