

## **Italian authorities break up tobacco smuggling ring thanks to OLAF tip-off**

**Officers from Italy's Guardia di Finanza have arrested nearly 40 people on charges of corruption, embezzlement and smuggling thanks to information supplied by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).**

The tip-off to the Italian authorities came after OLAF investigators analysing large shipments of water pipe tobacco uncovered two consignments that they considered to be at very high risk of being smuggled into Italy. The consignments were about to be shipped from the United Arab Emirates to Morocco via the Italian port of Salerno.

OLAF passed on this information to the Guardia di Finanza and asked it to closely monitor the shipments in question. The Guardia di Finanza in Salerno, under the supervision of the local Prosecutor's Office, decided to open a criminal investigation.

Following their investigation, on 5 May 2020 more than 250 Guardia di Finanza officers from Salerno, assisted by 17 customs officers, moved against 69 people they considered to be involved in a variety of criminal activities in the port.

Of these, some 39 were arrested, including officials, customs brokers or company employees. A further 30 people have either had their movements restricted or been temporarily suspended from their official or professional duties.

They have been charged with a variety of crimes including corruption, embezzlement, illegal access to databases, receiving stolen goods, smuggling and international traffic of waste.

During the same investigation, the Guardia di Finanza also ascertained that more than five million cigarettes in transit through the port of Salerno and destined for sale outside the EU never left the harbour but were instead smuggled into the city.

Director-General of OLAF, Ville Itälä, said: *"This outstanding result in Italy underlines yet again the value of OLAF and its complex investigative activities. I would like to thank the Guardia di Finanza for their close cooperation, thanks to which we have made a major contribution to the fight against customs fraud in the EU and helped uncover an operation that goes far beyond smuggling into corruption, embezzlement and trafficking. Thanks to our joint efforts, we have once again helped protect the financial interests of the EU and its citizens."*

**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.

**For further details:**

Jana CAPPELLO  
Spokesperson  
European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)  
Phone: +32 2 29 85549  
E-mail: [olaf-media@ec.europa.eu](mailto:olaf-media@ec.europa.eu)  
[http://ec.europa.eu/anti\\_fraud](http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud)



Chris JONES  
Deputy Spokesperson  
European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)  
+32 2 29 91606  
[olaf-media@ec.europa.eu](mailto:olaf-media@ec.europa.eu)  
[http://ec.europa.eu/anti\\_fraud](http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud)

