



EUROPEAN ANTI-FRAUD OFFICE

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## **Massive transnational operation halts criminal organization: OLAF helps seize 31 million illegal cigarettes**

**A transnational criminal organization that had been smuggling cigarettes from Eastern Europe and North Africa into Spain was halted by an operation of the Spanish Guardia Civil, with the help of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and national partners. Furthermore, 50 individuals were detained during the so-called "Operation Mangalica." OLAF was called on by its Spanish partners to help run the simultaneous controls in Spain, Bulgaria, Romania and Portugal. Coordinated raids resulted in the seizure of more than 31 million cigarettes, including cheap whites and counterfeit Marlboro cigarettes. In Spain, 42 individuals were detained and 144.000 euro confiscated. Romanian national authorities also detained seven persons, while Bulgarian authorities apprehended the leader of the organization.**

The criminal network in question operated in both Europe and in Africa. One of its main routes for smuggling illegal cigarettes went from Bulgaria, through Romania, to Spain; another illegal route brought the cigarettes to Spain from Dakar (Senegal) via Portugal. The organization was run by Romanian and Bulgarian nationals, some of which resided in Spain, and has been active since 2015. Romania and Portugal were used as transit countries, while the cigarettes were illegally stored before finding their way into the European Union's (EU) black market.

To carry out this complex operation, the Spanish Guardia Civil was supported by the Romanian Border Police, the Romanian Coast Guard authority, the Bulgarian National Police and the Portuguese National Police. OLAF provided operational support by organizing meetings and facilitating the exchange of information for the preparation and execution of the raids. The Office also facilitated the exchange of rogatory letters and supported national authorities in gathering evidence and analysing documents.

### **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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