



EUROPEAN ANTI-FRAUD OFFICE

PRESS RELEASE No 01/2017

21/01/2017

OLAF operations thwart cigarette smugglers by stopping millions of cigarettes from entering the EU black market

More than 42 million “cheap white” and counterfeit cigarettes set to debark on the European Union (EU) shores were stopped from entering the black market thanks to information and expertise provided by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). Within the course of one month, three separate operations involving law enforcement authorities from Belgium, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands and Spain prevented smugglers from snatching a profit of about 8.4 million euros by averting customs duties and other taxes.

The first operation took place at the end of November 2016 when, as a result of information provided by OLAF and with the cooperation of Belgian, German and Dutch customs authorities, 10.4 million cigarettes were seized. These were counterfeit American Legend cigarettes that had found their way to Europe from Vietnam. The cargo was caught in the Netherlands, on its way to the Germany.

In December, 9 million “cheap white” cigarettes labelled Deluxe were concealed under a load of wheelchairs and uncovered with the help of Spanish customs at the port of Barcelona. That same month, at the Greek port of Piraeus, four containers filled with rattan chairs aimed to hide approximately 23 million cigarettes (9.95 million Royal Blue and 12.99 million De Santis branded cigarettes), also shipped from Vietnam. In a broad definition, such “cheap white” cigarettes belong to brands sold illegally in the EU, by producers having no legal distribution network and who do not pay any taxes in the EU.

These new operations showcase the relevance of OLAF's coordination role in the fight against cigarette smuggling and underline the strong collaboration of the Office with national authorities in this field.

For further details please see also:

Agencia Tributaria:

[http://www.agenciatributaria.es/AEAT.internet/Inicio/RSS/Todas las Novedades/Sala de Prensa/Aprehendidos en Barcelona dos contenedores procedentes de Asia con 950 00 cajetillas de tabaco de contrabando.shtml](http://www.agenciatributaria.es/AEAT.internet/Inicio/RSS/Todas%20las%20Novedades/Sala%20de%20Prensa/Aprehendidos%20en%20Barcelona%20dos%20contenedores%20procedentes%20de%20Asia%20con%20950%2000%20cajetillas%20de%20tabaco%20de%20contrabando.shtml)

Hellenic Coast Guard: <http://www.hcg.gr/node/14097>

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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