EUROPEAN ANTI-FRAUD OFFICE

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OLAF helps prevent illegal dumping of thousands of tonnes of textile waste

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) has helped identify large-scale trafficking of textile waste from Italy to Türkiye.

The textiles in question contain a high percentage of acrylic fibres, which are non-biodegradable and can last in the environment for as long as 200 years. They require specific recycling technology and are subject to strict and expensive recycling rules. In cooperation with the Italian Carabinieri, OLAF studied the availability of this technology and combined it with analysis of trade flows and customs data to identify several shipments that were mislabelled to avoid the more expensive recycling requirements.

Collaborating closely with the Turkish customs authorities, OLAF ensured that for these suspicious shipments were inspected upon arrival in Türkiye. Around 4,200 tonnes of textile waste were identified as having been illegally shipped from Italy to Türkiye.

OLAF also took part in an on-the-spot inspection organised by the Turkish authorities alongside Carabinieri and specialists from the Tuscany regional environmental protection agency (ARPAT) from Italy. Nearly 2,100 tonnes of textiles were discovered during the inspection, stocked in a warehouse owned by a Turkish recycling facility that was not managed in accordance with applicable Turkish environmental regulations and permit requirements. Thanks to OLAF intelligence, a further 768 tonnes of textile waste originating from Italy and connected to the same fraudulent scheme were found stored in the Turkish port of Mersin, also incorrectly labelled and ready to be illegally dumped. All these shipments were seized by the Turkish authorities.

Petr Klement, Director-General of OLAF, said: *"Schemes such as this one that offer ways to illegally avoid the cost of recycling certain kinds of textile waste or complying with environmental rules are an opportunity for organised networks to make illegal gains. The threat to our economy and our environment is both real and massive. OLAF's work is crucial in tracking down these shipments and working with national authorities in and around Europe to detect and seize the waste and helping to take down these criminal organisations. This case showcases the significance and the impact of OLAF's work for the benefit of Europeans today and tomorrow."*

OLAF's work also resulted this week in a raid by the Italian Carabinieri in Brescia, in the northern Italian region of Lombardy, on a business complex owned by a company linked to the illegal exports. The company's assets, including its operating facilities, a fleet of articulated trucks illegally used for transport and around €12 million in financial assets, were seized as a result of the raid. For more information, see the press release from the *Comando Carabinieri per la Tutela Forestale Brescia*.

Background

The EU's textile and clothing sector is a significant economic force, generating a turnover of €170 billion in 2023 and employing 1.3 million people across 197,000 companies. But textile waste is notoriously slow and costly to recycle: around 12.6 million tonnes of waste was generated in 2019, of which only one-fifth was separately collected for reuse or recycling.

The European Commission introduced new rules on the sustainable management of textile waste in October 2025. Among other measures, the new rules make a clear distinction between used textiles and textile waste. All separately collected textiles are now considered as waste, and each EU country must ensure that separately collected textiles undergo sorting operations before their possible shipment, preventing waste from being falsely labelled and exported as reusable.

Textiles that are not sorted in this way are subject to a different, set of rules, the Waste Shipment Regulation, which also reinforces OLAF in supporting Member State investigations into waste trafficking.

OLAF mission, mandate and competences:
OLAF's mission is to detect, investigate and stop wrongdoings related to 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.

Once OLAF has completed its investigation, it is for the competent EU and national authorities to examine and decide on the follow-up of OLAF's recommendations. All persons concerned are presumed to be innocent until proven guilty in a competent national or EU court of law.

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