

Joint customs operation MAGNUM II: real-time intelligence exchange leads to 19 million cigarette capture

More than 19 million cigarettes were seized during a Joint Customs Operation (JCO) coordinated by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the Estonian Customs Administration, involving 14 European Union Member States¹, FRONTEX and EUROPOL. A secure communication system was used to connect all participants in real time - a key factor for the success of the operation.

JCO MAGNUM II ran between May and June 2017 and targeted the smuggling of tobacco products transported by road and rail cargo into the EU territory from third countries.

OLAF coordinated the operation by providing Member States access to VOCU (Virtual Operation Coordination Unit) - a secure communication system facilitating live intelligence exchange on consignments. This timely transfer of information plays a major role in apprehending smugglers.

One of the largest seizures in the operation - of several million cigarettes - was made in June 2017 by the Latvian Customs Authority. In this case, a vehicle arrived from Belarus at the Latvian border crossing point and was selected for inspection. The vehicle was equipped with an illegal mechanism which allowed it to switch license plates automatically, at the push of a button. The smugglers hoped that new tags would mean escaping controls - unfortunately for them, the officers caught on to their tricks and also passed the information along to other Member States.

This demonstrates that while smugglers constantly try to design and implement new fraudulent methods in order to skip customs controls, cross-European cooperation is the most efficient way for EU authorities to stay ahead of the curve.

The final results of the operation were shared during a debriefing meeting in Estonia on 7 September 2017. JCO MAGNUM II followed previous regional operation MAGNUM I, coordinated by Estonian Customs and OLAF, which also targeted the smuggling of tobacco products and resulted in the seizure of 11 million cigarettes.

¹ Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom

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:

Silvana ENCLUESCU

Acting Spokesperson

European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)

Phone: +32 2 29 57336

E-mail: olaf-media@ec.europa.eu

http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud



[@OLAFPress](https://twitter.com/OLAFPress)