

## **Joint Customs Operation Colosseum**

Customs operations are organised not only to safeguard the EU's financial interests but also to protect our citizens and on this occasion, our cultural heritage. Joint Customs Operation (JCO) Colosseum was the first joint customs operation to target the illicit trade of cultural goods.

From 7 to 18 November 2011, within the activities coordinated by the Customs Cooperation Working Party of the Council of the EU, a joint customs operation named Colosseum was carried out. Its aim was to fight against the illicit trade in cultural goods.

The Colosseum, lead by the Italian Customs Agency has been co-financed by the European Commission in the framework of the ISEC Programme. It was conducted in cooperation with Greece, Cyprus and Malta as co-runners and with the RILO Western Europe, Interpol and OLAF.

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Romania, the Netherlands, Slovak Republic, Spain, Russia, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and USA also participated in the JCO. In most of the participating countries, both customs and police authorities were involved in the operation, as they both have competencies in this sector. In Italy, for example, the Unit for Protection of Cultural Heritage of the Carabinieri and the Guardia di Finanza, helped the Customs Agency,

The results of the operation were presented on 8 March, in Rome, at a debriefing meeting organised by the Italian Customs Agency.

### **Most important seizures**

#### In Greece:

70 archaeological objects dated from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. were seized by the Greek Police in Thessalonica. The assortment of artefacts was from Central Macedonia (Area Pella, Sindos), probably stolen from tombs of ancient warriors, and is composed of helmets, gold masks, clay statuettes and pots.

Due to archaeological and historical reasons, the objects almost invaluable: Estimation is still being carried out by a special committee of the Greek Ministry of Culture.

*By courtesy of the Greek Customs*



In Switzerland:

118 antique Greek coins were seized by the Swiss Customs at Zurich Airport. The coins were concealed in a CD player. The smuggler presented himself as a collector and declared that the coins were bought in famous auction houses in Munich and Brussels. His intention was to sell them in Switzerland.

*By courtesy of the Swiss Customs*



In Italy:

18 ancient books were seized by the Italian customs at Malpensa Airport in Milan. They were en-route to the United States. The books were inspected by the "Lombardy Regional Board of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage" that confirmed that they dated back to the 16<sup>th</sup> - 17th century, and their approximate value is 30 000 euros.



*c*  
*ourtesy of the Italian Customs*

In Russia:

98 ancient coins and 2 ancient books were seized by the Russian Customs the 19 October 2011 at Domodedovo Airport, Moscow. The artefacts which were en-route to Germany were concealed in a Russian woman's baggage.

An assortment of 73 ancient books, medals, gravures paintings and post cards was seized by the Russian customs 12 November 2011 at Sheremetevo Airport in Moscow. The artefacts were en-route from Germany and were discovered in the mail centre, thanks to an X-Ray check.