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PRESS RELEASE

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Operation SNAKE: EU and Chinese customs join forces to target undervaluation of goods at customs

EU and national authorities prevented losses of over €80 million in customs duties, during a major joint customs operation (JCO) coordinated by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). This joint customs operation had particular significance as, for the first time ever, it also involved Chinese customs authorities. Operation "SNAKE" specifically targeted the undervaluation of imported goods, which causes huge losses to public budgets every year. Over a one month period, OLAF and the participating customs authorities detected more than 1,500 containers where the declared customs value was heavily undervalued. This included false descriptions of goods, false weights and quantities, and counterfeit goods. In addition, customs authorities succeeded in identifying several so-called missing traders and non-existent importers, triggering a number of criminal and administrative investigations in several countries.

Algirdas Šemeta, Commissioner responsible for Customs and Anti-Fraud, said: "*Operation SNAKE proves once again the benefits of joining forces at global level to fight a common threat. The undervaluation of imported goods is an endemic problem worldwide, affecting not only EU customs, but also those of other countries, including China. I welcome the Chinese participation in this operation, and hope that it paves the way for many more successful initiatives together to fight against fraud.*"

Undervaluation of imported goods causes huge losses to the EU and Member States' budgets every year. When goods are imported into the EU, they are subject to specific customs duties, based on the real value of the goods. However, some criminals fraudulently declare a lower value on their goods, to the detriment of public budgets, in order to increase their profit margins. Operation SNAKE was carried out to specifically target this type of fraud and generate increased intelligence, stronger cross-border cooperation and a more effective crack-down on undervaluation in the future.

The operational phase of Operation SNAKE took place from February to March 2014. Coordinated by OLAF and the Anti-smuggling Bureau of the General Administration of China Customs, it involved the customs administrations of all EU Member States, as well as those of the People's Republic of China. The participants cooperated using a secure communication channel developed by OLAF for this type of operation. On 4 and 5 September, all participating officials met at OLAF's headquarters in Brussels to present the final results of the Operation. The Commission and the General Administration of China Customs intend to continue this successful cooperation with further initiatives.

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Background

The mission of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) is threefold: it protects the financial interests of the European Union by investigating fraud, corruption and any other illegal activities; it detects and investigates serious matters relating to the discharge of professional duties by members and staff of the EU institutions and bodies that could result in disciplinary or criminal proceedings; and it supports the EU institutions, in particular the European Commission, in the development and implementation of anti-fraud legislation and policies.

Useful links

For more information on OLAF, see: http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud/index_en.htm

For further details on previous JCOs, see: http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud/policy/joint-customs-operations/index_en.htm

Homepage of Commissioner Šemeta: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/semeta/index_en.htm

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