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PRESS RELEASE

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Operation REPLICa: 1.2 million counterfeit goods and 130 million cigarettes seized in EU-led operation

Over 1.2 million counterfeit goods and 130 million cigarettes were seized during an international joint customs operation coordinated by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). The Operation, code-named REPLICa, targeted the import of counterfeit goods by sea. Under the coordination of OLAF, customs authorities carried out targeted physical or X-ray controls on several hundred selected containers. These checks uncovered a wide array of counterfeit goods including cigarettes, perfumes, car and bicycle spare parts, toys, fashion accessories and electric devices. The seizures of cigarettes alone prevented the loss of €25 million in customs duties and taxes. In fact, the amount of cigarettes seized is equivalent to what 17 000 people, smoking a packet a day, would consume in a year. In terms of overall seizures in this Operation, the value of the equivalent genuine products is estimated to be over €65 million.

Algirdas Šemeta, Commissioner responsible for customs and anti-fraud said “*Operation REPLICa shows what can be achieved when customs authorities, international partners and industry work together to fight fakes. Counterfeit goods defraud consumers, harm legitimate businesses and cause huge losses to public revenues. Counterfeit cigarettes also undermine public health policies. When fakes flood our markets, the only ones to benefit are fraudsters and criminals. I warmly congratulate all those that participated in Operation REPLICa for the excellent results.*”

Operation REPLICa was organised within the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) framework as part of joint efforts in the fight against counterfeit goods. The results of the operation were shared at a debriefing meeting held in Brussels on 2-3 October.

During the operational phase of REPLICa, OLAF facilitated the cooperation between all the EU Member States, Norway, Switzerland, 11 international partners ⁽¹⁾, Interpol, Europol and the World Customs Organisation. The operation was coordinated by OLAF with the support of a team of eleven liaison officers from the EU Member States and China, all working together in Brussels. It was the first time that a Chinese Customs Liaison Officer worked from the operational headquarters at OLAF. A Virtual Operational Coordination Unit (VOCU) - a brand new secure communication channel for such joint customs operations - was used to channel the flow of incoming information.

¹ Australia, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, Russian Federation, Thailand

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A number of legitimate rights-holders also provided a valuable contribution in the targeting of the goods covered by the operation and this led to several successful seizures. The close cooperation with the right holders will be further explored by OLAF especially for products posing a danger to the health and safety of citizens or potentially harmful for the environment. Most international EU ports were also involved during the two-week period, providing support for checking the containers. The exchange of information in real time allowed all the experts involved to identify the suspect flows of counterfeit goods out of ordinary commercial transactions.

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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