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Second major seizure of smuggled cigarettes in Greece within a week prevents loss of several million euros

For the second time within a week, Greek authorities carried out a successful operation against international cigarette smugglers. On the basis of information gathered by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), the Financial and Economic Crime Unit (SDOE) and Greek customs seized once again nearly 20 million contraband cigarettes. Taken together, the two operations prevented the loss of more than 7 million euros in unpaid duties and taxes.

The Director-General of OLAF, Mr Giovanni Kessler said: *"It is very good news to hear that in less than a week, our Greek partners were once again able to intercept an international contraband operation of this magnitude. This second seizure shows the importance of international cooperation and the contribution that OLAF can bring to the fight against tobacco smuggling. For single authorities, it is a great challenge to intercept such complex contraband operations run by criminal organisations. I would like to congratulate the Greek authorities for this new success."*

On 6 March, OLAF received information on three containers declared as loaded with crumb rubber, but suspected of containing contraband cigarettes. These containers were shipped from the harbour of Pasir Gudang in Malaysia to Piraeus in Greece. OLAF sent this information to the competent Greek authorities. Preliminary checks carried out by the SDOE revealed that the consignee of the containers did not exist. When the suspect lading was checked upon arrival in the port of Piraeus on 13 and 14 March, the Greek authorities discovered that two of the three containers were in fact loaded with smuggled cigarettes. The same pattern of action had been unveiled in a related case, a week earlier.

Inspecting the containers, the Greek authorities discovered a total of 1 996 boxes of contraband cigarettes. The two containers were loaded with 998 boxes each of "RGD" brand cigarettes, totalling up to 998,000 packages or 19.96 million pieces of cigarettes. Only the third container was loaded with crumb rubber as declared. The investigation continues, with authorities seeking to identify the intended recipient of these cigarettes, whose identity and address on the shipping documents were fake.

Unpaid duties and taxes on these smuggled cigarettes amount to more than EUR 3.5 million in the new case, leading to a prevented loss of more than EUR 7 million in the two operations carried out by the Greek authorities recently.

Given the nearly identical pattern, OLAF and the Greek authorities suspect the same criminal organisation to be behind the two smuggling attempts. In both cases, three containers were shipped from Malaysia to Piraeus, two of which were loaded with contraband cigarettes.

See related [Press release no. 3: "Nearly 20 million contraband cigarettes seized in Greece in a major operation targeting international smugglers"](#)

OLAF

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.

For further details:

Alina BUREA

Spokesperson

European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)

Phone: +32 2 295 73 36

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

http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud