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## Operation HYGIEA: OLAF, Asian & EU customs lead large-scale operation against counterfeit goods

**Operation HYGIEA: Approximately 200,000 pieces of counterfeit perfumes, toothpastes, cosmetics, 120 tons of counterfeit detergents, shampoos, diapers as well as more than 4.2 million of other counterfeit goods (battery cells, footwear, toys, tennis balls, shavers, electronic devices, etc.), 77million cigarettes and 44 tons of counterfeit water pipe tobacco have been seized by the Asian and EU customs authorities in an ASEM-led operation coordinated by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)**

The Joint Customs Operation HYGIEA was carried out within the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) framework as part of joint efforts of the participating countries in the fight against counterfeit goods. The results of this operation coordinated by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) were shared at the 13<sup>th</sup> ASEM Customs Director-Generals and Commissioners' (\*) meeting held in Ha Long Bay, Vietnam, on 9-10 October 2019.

On behalf of the ASEM Customs Director-Generals and Commissioners (\*) and the European Commission, Mr NGUYEN VAN CAN, Director- General of Vietnam customs and Chairperson, announced that the results of the Operation code-named "HYGIEA" targeting counterfeit goods used in the daily lives of citizens (also called fast-moving consumer goods or FMCG), include:

A total of **194,498 pieces of counterfeit perfumes, toothpaste, cosmetics as well as 120,833.69kg of counterfeit detergent, shampoo, diapers** detained and seized as direct results of the operation targeting counterfeit FMCG products.

In addition to the above seized counterfeit goods, several shipments of tobacco products – either found to be counterfeit or intended to be smuggled - containing **44,062 kg of water pipe tobacco** and **77,811,800 cigarettes** in total were detained during the operation.

- **4,202,432 pieces of other counterfeit items** (battery cells, footwear, toys, tennis balls, shavers, electronic devices, etc.), including non-compliant with the safety rules or smuggled.

During this operation, the customs authorities carried out targeted physical or X-ray controls on several hundred selected shipments transported by sea containers. These checks uncovered a wide array of counterfeit goods including counterfeit cosmetics, perfumes, soaps, shampoos, detergents, battery cells, footwear, toys, tennis balls, shavers, electronic devices.

During the operational phase of HYGIEA, OLAF facilitated the cooperation between the participant countries with the support of a team of ten liaison officers from Bangladesh, China, Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Spain and EUROPOL, all working together in Brussels. A Virtual Operational Coordination Unit (VOCU) - a secure communication channel for such joint customs operations was used to channel the flow of incoming information. This exchange of information in real time allowed all the experts involved to identify the suspect flows of counterfeit goods out of ordinary commercial transactions.

Mr Ville ITALIA, Director-General of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), said that *"Operation HYGIEA 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 goods 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 HYGIEA for the excellent results."*

[\*] EU Member States, Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Rep. Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Switzerland, Thailand, and Vietnam

#### **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.

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