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## **Real-time intelligence exchange leads to seizure of seven million cigarettes at EU external border**

**Border agencies seized more than seven million cigarettes during a Joint Border Control Operation (JBCO) coordinated by the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) in cooperation with the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).**

The JBCO codenamed "JANUS" ran between May and June 2018 and prompted border agencies from the participating countries (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine) to instantaneously share intelligence on suspicious consignments mainly transported by road in commercial trucks and trailers.

Goods were either physically checked or examined with the help of x-ray machines. As a result, border agencies discovered several large cargos of cigarettes which had been smuggled from Moldova or Ukraine into the European Union.

OLAF provided participants with access to its Virtual Operation Coordination Unit, a secure communication system facilitating intelligence exchange on shipments in real time.

The timely transfer of information played a major role in this operation, helping partners not only track the suspicious shipments, but also uncover the fraudsters' modus operandi.

"Cigarette smuggling harms European citizens and funds organised crime," OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä said. "Only by working together in joint operations such as this one can we stop traffickers and dismantle criminal networks," he added.

The final results of JBCO "JANUS" were shared during a debriefing meeting held in Odessa, Ukraine, on 17 October 2018, in the framework of Task Force Tobacco, the EUBAM platform aimed at strengthening the fight against cigarettes smuggling.

"EUBAM continues its efforts aimed at preventing and fighting cross border crime in the region. By tackling illicit trade in tobacco products, JBCO "JANUS" proved once again how beneficial the international cooperation is in this field," said Slawomir Pichor, the Head of EUBAM Mission. "I want to thank OLAF, for being EUBAM's key partner in coordinating this operation, as well as the five EU Member States and to the Moldovan and Ukrainian border agencies for replying positively to this common attempt to fight cigarette smuggling in the region," he added.

**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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