

OLAF intelligence supports Spanish Operation enforcing EU sanctions against Russia

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) assisted the Spanish authorities with the enforcement of EU sanctions against Russia during Operation "Probirka" (Russian for "Test Tube"). The operation led to the arrest of four individuals involved in the illegal export of chemicals to Russia and the seizure of 13 tons of chemical substances.

Since 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the European Union has imposed sanctions on the country, including strict bans on the export and import of certain goods. OLAF has been actively engaged in investigating, monitoring trade flows, conducting analytical work, and identifying potential attempts to circumvent these sanctions. By mapping out suspicious trade routes and identifying operators, OLAF has played a key role in preventing illegal transactions that could support Russia's military capabilities.

As part of the Joint Sanctions Enforcement Operation that OLAF has been running since July 2023, OLAF was called upon by the Spanish authorities to assist with investigations into the export of chemical substances from Spain. It was suspected that certain companies were bypassing EU sanctions by rerouting goods through intermediaries in Kyrgyzstan, with the final destination being Russia.

OLAF responded by gathering export data from various EU Member States and sharing critical intelligence with the Spanish investigators. OLAF's collaboration provided crucial evidence to confirm that these illegal exports were indeed reaching Russia.

Ville Itälä, Director-General of OLAF, reiterated that: *"OLAF's ability to join the dots and to bring together the data and intelligence from national authorities is once again key to the success of our partners. OLAF is best placed to facilitate this synergy and cooperation and we remain steadfast in our commitment to support our partners in their endeavours to enforce the sanctions imposed on Russia and Belarus. Sanctions are only as effective as their enforcement, and we are proud to contribute actively."*

Four arrested and 13 tons of chemicals seized

As part of the investigation, the Spanish National Police and Customs Surveillance Service arrested four individuals in the Spanish region of Catalonia, three of whom are Russian nationals. The operation also resulted in the seizure of 13,000 kilograms of a chemical compound subject to export restrictions, at the Port of Barcelona.

The investigation revealed that a Spanish company, managed by Russian nationals, had established a sophisticated logistical and economic scheme to export internationally

sanctioned chemical products to Russia. This network involved the use of shell companies in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan to disguise the true destination of the goods, which were later rerouted to Russia.

OLAF's contribution has been pivotal in enhancing the Spanish authorities' ability to enforce EU sanctions and prevent illegal trade that could undermine the effectiveness of the sanctions against Russia. The investigation remains ongoing, with efforts focused on identifying and arresting additional individuals involved in this smuggling network.

For more information on the operation, you can read the [press release](#) issued by Spain's National Police.

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.



Once OLAF has completed its investigation, it is for the competent EU and national authorities to examine and decide on the follow-up of OLAF's recommendations. All persons concerned are presumed to be innocent until proven guilty in a competent national or EU court of law.

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