

OLAF coordinates international investigation into suspected circumvention of EU sanctions involving over 760 transport vehicles

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) has coordinated a complex cross-border investigation into the suspected circumvention of European Union sanctions against Russia involving the export of over 760 transport vehicles from the EU, with the assistance of national authorities.

OLAF plays a central role in detecting, investigating, and disrupting attempts to circumvent EU restrictive measures, working in close cooperation with Member States and international partners. Effective enforcement of EU sanctions is essential to safeguarding the Union's defence and security interests.

The investigation was launched following information provided by the Polish authorities, who identified suspicious exports of used vehicles from several EU Member States. Although the vehicles were declared as destined for Türkiye, evidence gathered by Polish customs suggested that their actual destination was Russia.

Through extensive data analysis and cross-checking of customs, trade, and transport information, OLAF uncovered a broader scheme involving multiple exporters in the EU and declared importers in third countries, including Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Moldova. Cooperation with the authorities of those countries enabled OLAF to establish that a total of 766 vehicles had never been imported into the declared destinations.

By tracking each vehicle individually, OLAF reconstructed the logistics chain and ultimately located the vehicles in Russia, confirming the suspected circumvention of EU sanctions. OLAF's findings led to criminal investigations in three different Member States. In addition, information shared by OLAF prompted the corresponding EU authorities to strengthen monitoring and risk profiling of future shipments.

Acting Director-General of OLAF, Salla Saastamoinen, stated: *“Sanctions circumvention undermines the effectiveness of the European Union’s restrictive measures. This investigation demonstrates how cooperation with Member States and third-country authorities enables OLAF to uncover complex cross-border schemes and protect the integrity of EU sanctions.”*

OLAF continues to work closely with its partners to ensure the effective enforcement of EU sanctions.

OLAF mission, mandate and competences:

OLAF's mission is to detect, investigate and stop wrongdoings related to 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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