

Operation Daphne: €17 million in illicit cash flows uncovered in one week

A major customs operation has uncovered illicit cross-border currency flows of €17 million potentially linked to money laundering, transnational criminal networks and terrorism financing. Operation Daphne, led by the Italian Customs and Monopolies Agency and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), with the support of Europol, took place late last year and involved 24 EU Member States.

Over the course of the week-long operation, customs authorities detected a total of 508 cases of undeclared and opaque cash flows, leading to 40 or so follow-up investigations that have now been concluded. The vast majority of the cases detected (423) involved air traffic, accounting for €15 million. Sea transport accounted for 41 cases (worth €987,000). Other means of transport were involved in the remaining cases. Most of the cases (453) concerned passengers travelling to/from outside the EU, carrying a total €15.6 million. Passengers travelling to/from EU countries accounted for 31 cases.

OLAF played a major part in the joint customs operation, providing both financial support and the use of its Virtual Operations Coordination Unit to enable the secure exchange of information during the operation. Europol performed crosschecks in its databases, allowing the identification of potential criminal links. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union also participated in the operation.

OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä commented: *"Illicit cash flows are by their very nature a cross-border challenge, and this is where OLAF can bring real added-value to operations of this sort. National customs authorities play a central role in detecting illicit cash flows at borders and in tackling related offences, but coordinating the tracking of these flows across national borders is much more effective with OLAF support. We are also uniquely placed to coordinate with other European-level actors such as Europol and with other relevant parts of European Commission. The successful identification of €17 million in illicit cash flows is proof positive of the effectiveness of this approach."*

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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