



EUROPEAN ANTI-FRAUD OFFICE

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Giovanni Kessler, OLAF Director-General, on field mission at the EU Eastern border

During the night of 21 September, the Romanian border with the Republic of Moldova was the setting of a major Joint Customs Operation aimed at curbing cigarette smuggling. For the first time, the Romanian, Moldovan and Ukrainian Heads of Customs, participated in the field checks, together with the Director-General of the European Anti-Fraud Office. This unprecedented attendance at check-point Albita showed the support of the four partners to the customs officers that work day and night to protect the European Union's Eastern border against trafficking.

The Joint Customs Operation, which started on 15 September, targets smugglers using personal cars, but also medium-tonnage, off-road vehicles, or even sailing boats to sneak cigarettes into the EU. Customs officials have reported that smuggling has increased in the Eastern, North-Eastern, and North-Western regions of Romania, hence the need for more targeted actions to stop criminals. Using mobile as well as canine teams, together with powerful scanners, customs officers have devised new strategies to stop this illegal trade. Officials along the EU Eastern border are constantly working together to identify the main routes smugglers use, as well as exchange preliminary information on natural and legal persons involved in organising these illegal activities.

"Joint customs operations, such as the one our Romanian, Moldovan and Ukrainian colleagues are carrying out today, are crucial to disrupt illegal trade and dismantle criminal networks. The operations I've just witnessed on the ground are an example of best practice, with EU and third countries working hand in hand, for our common interest, through coordinated action", OLAF Director-General Giovanni Kessler said. "Only through such joint work, will we succeed in making the EU's Eastern border less permeable to smuggling and protect the financial interests of the European citizens" he added. "I congratulate the participants for their commitment and results".

"Today's meeting at Albita marks an important step in the cross-border relations between the three countries. The presence of OLAF management on the ground, at the border, gives a strong signal to enhance the security of the EU's Eastern border, to combat traffic and to protect the EU's financial interests. Romanian customs play a key role in this respect" said Mr Dorel Fronea, Vice-President of the Romanian Fiscal Administration and Customs Coordinator.

Background:

With a mandate to investigate fraud involving EU funds, but also to protect the EU revenue by fighting illicit trade, the European Anti-Fraud Office is very active in tackling cigarette smuggling. OLAF estimates the total quantity of cigarettes seized as a result of its overall activities in 2015 at 619 million cigarette sticks.

On the occasion of this field mission, the OLAF Director-General also reminded the participants that the European Commission has encouraged all EU Member States and international partners to sign and ratify the World Health Organisation Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products ("FCTC Protocol").

Pictures from the operations are available [here](#).

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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