



EUROPEAN ANTI-FRAUD OFFICE

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Nearly 20 million contraband cigarettes seized in Greece in a major operation targeting international smugglers

Based on information gathered by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), Greek authorities have carried-out a successful operation against international cigarette smugglers. The Financial and Economic Crime Unit (SDOE) and Greek customs seized nearly 20 million contraband cigarettes. The operation prevented the loss of more than 3.5 million euros in unpaid duties and taxes.

The Director-General of OLAF, Mr Giovanni Kessler said: *"The smuggling of cigarettes by sea occurs through complex contraband operations run by criminal organisations, often involving several transshipments, false or misleading bills of lading. It is very difficult for single authorities to intercept international contraband operations. This is where OLAF can bring added value by facilitating the exchange of information between our partners and providing information on the movement of cigarette containers. I would like to congratulate the Greek authorities on this success."*

On 4 March, OLAF received information on three containers declared as loaded with plastic tier drawers, but suspected of containing contraband cigarettes. These containers were shipped from Port Klang in Malaysia to Piraeus in Greece. OLAF passed on this information to the competent Greek authorities which checked the suspect lading on a container ship in the port of Piraeus on 7 March. The Greek authorities discovered that two of the three containers were in fact loaded with smuggled cigarettes, while the third container was loaded with tier drawers as declared. All three containers were seized.

Inspecting the containers, the Greek authorities discovered a total of 1,990 boxes of contraband cigarettes. While the first container was loaded with 998 boxes of "RGD" brand cigarettes (that is 499,000 packages or 9.98 million pieces of cigarettes), the second one contained 992 boxes of "Bon Classic" brand cigarettes (496,000 packages or 9.92 million pieces).

Unpaid duties and taxes on these smuggled cigarettes amount to about 3.5 million euros.

OLAF

The mission of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) is threefold: it protects the financial interests of the European Union by investigating fraud, corruption and any other illegal activities; it detects and investigates serious matters relating to the discharge of professional duties by members and staff of the EU institutions and bodies that could result in disciplinary or criminal proceedings; and it supports the EU institutions, in particular the European Commission, in the development and implementation of anti-fraud legislation and policies.

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