

PRESS RELEASE No 09/2021

31 May 2021

Almost 10 million contraband cigarettes seized in Greece

Thanks to a tip-off from the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), Greek authorities seized a container with 9,650,000 cigarettes in the port of Piraeus (Athens) last week. The smugglers had tried to pass the cigarettes off as suitcases.

OLAF alerted the Greek authorities when it identified the suspicious cargo, which was officially declared as suitcases and routed from China to Slovakia. As a result, the Greek Operational Coordination Centre (SEK), the national Customs Authorities and the Hellenic Coast Guard were able to find and seize 9,650,000 cigarettes that would have otherwise been smuggled into the EU. Initial information about the shipment was supplied to OLAF by the Chinese Anti-Smuggling Bureau.

Ville Itälä, Director-General of OLAF, said: *"I congratulate our Greek colleagues on this successful operation and I'm pleased that OLAF played a pivotal role. Thanks to an excellent cooperation with the Greek authorities, we prevented a loss in excise duties and VAT that is estimated at around €2 million. The fight against cigarette smuggling has been an integral part of OLAF's work for years now and continues in 2021."*

To keep contraband cigarettes outside of EU borders, OLAF tracks suspicious consignments worldwide and gathers intelligence on the operators and means of transportation involved. OLAF works in close cooperation with the competent services in the EU Member States and third countries and acts as a coordination hub when required.

In 2020 alone, and despite the ongoing pandemic, OLAF helped seize a [total of nearly 370 million cigarettes](#), preventing an estimated loss in public finances of roughly €74 million.

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.

For further details:

Jana CAPPELLO
Spokesperson
European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)
Phone: +32 2 29 85549
E-mail: olaf-media@ec.europa.eu
http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud



Chris JONES
Deputy Spokesperson
European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)
+32 2 29 91606
olaf-media@ec.europa.eu
http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud

