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11 tonnes of pesticides seized thanks to OLAF and Bulgarian authorities

In a joint intervention, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the Bulgarian authorities intercepted around 11 tonnes of illicit pesticides in Bulgaria earlier this month. Various kinds of violations were detected.

Some of the substances seized are banned in the EU altogether due to their danger for human health and the environment. Thiamethoxam and Imidacloprid can harm domesticated honey bees and wild pollinators, while Chlorpyrifos can result in neurotoxicity and has adverse neurodevelopmental effects on children. Harm against pollinators can also, in turn, pose a threat to food security.

Other violations that OLAF and the Bulgarian authorities found were expired products, unlabelled items or labels that did not respect the obligation of including a translation into the local language (namely: Bulgarian). Investigators have reason to believe that the illicit pesticides were smuggled from outside the European Union.

OLAF worked closely with the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency and the Bulgarian National Police General Directorate throughout investigative activities and the intervention. In particular, OLAF coordinated the gathering and analysis of intelligence.

Ville Itälä, Director-General of OLAF, said: "*Fraud is not an abstract concept – fraud can harm humans and the environment alike. Some of the illicit substances that we seized together with the Bulgarian authorities are very dangerous for human health and for bees. I would like to thank colleagues in the Bulgarian authorities for the good cooperation that allowed for this important result. Together, we are stronger and we protect Europeans and our environment*".

Further enquiries into the matter are ongoing. In order to protect their confidentiality as well as procedural rights and personal data, OLAF can make no further comment at this stage.

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.

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