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Stopping fraudsters in their tracks – OLAF and Belgian Customs present results of cooperation in several large tobacco, biodiesel investigations

Every year, more than 3400 billion euro worth of products are imported or exported in the European Union (EU), accounting for 15% of global trade. Import duties on these items alone make up more than 10% of the EU budget - a valuable source of revenue. In recent years, authorities have stepped up their joint efforts to efficiently counter customs fraud and to ensure that this income is not diverted into the pockets of fraudsters. The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the Belgian Administration of Customs and Excise held a joint press conference of 7 December in Brussels to present the results of their joint efforts in recent, large, cross-border customs fraud investigations.

The joint cooperation between the two agencies meant that investigators were able to share operational information that led to the seizure of at least 140,000 counterfeit cigarettes, a string of arrests, the discovery of illegal warehouses and the dismantling of a criminal network involved in the trafficking of counterfeits from China into the EU. Similarly, in a case involving the evasion of anti-dumping duties on biodiesel, OLAF and Belgian Customs uncovered a fraud scheme that led to the recovery of 21,882,171 euro evaded duties, as well as prevented further harm done to EU revenue. The successful results obtained in these cases were only possible through the mutual operational support of the two partners.

At the opening of the press conference, OLAF Director-General, Giovanni Kessler said: "The role of customs is evolving to match an ever-growing, fast-paced market. We need modern, interconnected customs to work with a European approach and ensure a clean, fair, safe and secure market place, to the benefit of citizens and law-abiding companies."

"It is through joint partnerships such as the one presented today that we will succeed in dismantling criminal networks and protecting much-needed revenue that can be used to fuel economic growth and job creation," he added.

Customs and Excise Director-General Kristian Vanderwaeren, noted that "It is also important to see and understand that the fraud landscape has changed a lot during the years and will continue to evolve with business trends, enhancements

in technology and most importantly, to stay ahead of ever changing criminal operations. Governments, organizations and enforcement agencies need to constantly evolve and adapt to stay ahead of the fraudsters. The partnership between OLAF and the General Administration of Customs and Excise aids in constantly reinventing itself and staying ahead of the curve.”

OLAF

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; and developing a sound EU anti-fraud policy.

The Belgian Administration of Customs and Excise

The implementation of the core tasks of the FPS Finance, is always revolving around the delicate balance between the rights which the law extends to citizens or companies and the obligations it imposes on them.

Furthermore, the FPS Finance carries out various tasks in the field of taxes, finances, etc. Our core activities, which we could call our reason for existence, are expressed in our mission in order to make them clear and comprehensible for all.

The FPS Finance is responsible for different tasks:

- Fair and correct taxation levied in due time, which means ensuring that every taxpayer pays what he owes in a correct and fair way;
- Optimal funding while guaranteeing the balance between the State Treasury and the outstanding debts, and the follow-up of the economic and financial requests in support of the relevant government policy;
- Within the framework of legal transactions involving goods, helping to ensure legal certainty by maintaining the public property records;
- Supervising flows of goods upon importation, transit and exportation in order to contribute to the organisation of the market, the economic safety, the protection of public health, the environment and the safety of people and goods;
- Contributing to preventing and fighting all forms of fraud in all areas of society;
- Providing policy support in the areas which are part of the “mission” of the FPS.

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