

Cooperation between OLAF, French and Spanish customs results in seizure of over 24 tonnes of mechanical parts

In a successful operation in the summer initiated thanks to information provided by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), French and Spanish customs services seized more than 24 tonnes of counterfeit bearings coming from China. The malfunction of such mechanical parts could be potentially dangerous.

The seizures took place in July and August, in both France and Spain, and were made possible by the close international cooperation between Member States and OLAF. The bearings in question were not produced by the genuine manufacturer and could thus not only cause mechanical failures but also endanger human lives, as some of the bearings seized could be destined for the transport sector. Additionally, the trade of such products causes financial damages to the European industry.

The Director-General of OLAF, Mr. Giovanni Kessler said: "These seizures illustrate the real added value that OLAF's international cooperation brings to the fight against the illegal trade of counterfeit products. I congratulate our customs partners on these good results."

In July 2015, based on information provided by OLAF, French customs authorities detained four containers loaded with bearings suspected to be counterfeit at the port of Le Havre. The four containers were destined for a company located in Spain. After confirmation by the right-holders of the brands detained, it was determined that three of the containers were indeed loaded with counterfeit bearings. The French customs authorities subsequently seized more than 21 tonnes (21.488 counterfeit bearings).

In close cooperation with French customs, OLAF passed on all the information related to the shipments to the Spanish customs authorities. In August, a control at the warehouse of the Spanish company involved led to the seizure of over 3 more tonnes (9.490 bearings). OLAF, as well as the rightful manufacturers, were present on the spot. The latter confirmed the products to be counterfeit and the bearings were subsequently seized.

Background

The trade of counterfeit products results in vast illicit profits and huge losses of tax revenues for the EU and its Member States. They harm the European economy as they damage legitimate business and stifle innovation, putting many jobs at risk in Europe. Also, counterfeiting often poses serious risks to the environment and for health and safety.

OLAF is competent to conduct investigations related to the smuggling of counterfeit goods, thereby protecting the EU and its Member States from huge customs levies and tax revenue losses. OLAF focuses on the smuggling of potentially dangerous products.

In 2013, OLAF had informed all the EU Member States about the suspected import of counterfeit bearings from China into the EU. Since then, OLAF has been transmitting yearly updates on the trends of the import of fake bearings into the EU to all EU Member States.

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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