

19th Task Group Cigarettes Conference: international efforts to fight cigarette smuggling

The annual Task Group Cigarettes Conference took place in Prague on 6-9 October. It was organised by the European Anti-Fraud Office ("OLAF") in close cooperation with Czech Customs. The event brought together over 80 experts from all 28 EU Member States as well as from third countries such as Albania, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Turkey and Ukraine.

The Conference, opened by the Deputy Minister of Finance of the Czech Republic, Ms Hornochova, provided an excellent opportunity for practitioners to share views about the fight against illegal cigarette smuggling in practice. Discussions focused on new smuggling techniques and general trends, as well as on the possible coordinated solutions for tackling this criminal activity.

Cigarette smuggling causes huge yearly losses to Member States and the EU in evaded customs duties and taxes. Smuggled tobacco respects no rules, and poses great risks to both consumers and businesses. It undermines anti-smoking and public health campaigns, and violates the strict rules that the EU and Member States have on manufacturing, distribution and sale.

Examples of practical cooperation between OLAF and Member States' authorities were presented, such as for example:

- OLAF's assistance to the Spanish Customs Investigation Service in an operation in mid-September which led to the dismantling of an illegal factory, the seizure of 36 tonnes of tobacco and cigarettes and the arrest of 18 persons.
- OLAF also provided information concerning container movements between the Netherlands and Portugal which led to the seizure of about 7 million cigarettes and the arrest of 3 persons in Portugal in late September.

Such examples show the excellent results that can be achieved through coordinated, Europe-wide action targetting smuggling. Further examples were recently also provided at the debriefing of [Operation REPLICA](#).

Representatives of several international organisations such as EUBAM, EUROPOL, INTERPOL, and Regional Intelligence Liaison Offices of the World Customs Organization and the WCO attended the Conference as observers.

OLAF

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