

PRESS RELEASE No 2/2015

25 February 2015

## **Cigarette smugglers' plans thwarted by law enforcement agencies with OLAF support**

**International cigarette smugglers suffered two major blows in January. In two operations coordinated by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), national customs services seized nearly 15 million smuggled cigarettes.**

In a first case, OLAF received valuable information from the Turkish customs according to which smugglers intended to ship a load of smuggled counterfeit cigarettes through the port of Haifa in Israel. This information came following a similar earlier seizure made by the Turkish customs in the port of Mersin. OLAF immediately informed Israeli customs services. On 16 January 2015, a special customs unit in Haifa was able to seize 10.2 million counterfeit Gauloises cigarettes which will now be destroyed. In addition to delivering a blow to international smugglers, the action coordinated by OLAF may have also averted losses to EU revenues since it is suspected that the cigarettes could have been ultimately destined for the EU market.

In a second case, a container with 4.2 million smuggled cigarettes was seized in the port of Riga on 21 January 2015. Based on information provided by OLAF, Spanish and Dutch customs authorities were able to track this container that had travelled across Europe and had been transhipped in the port of Rotterdam before being finally intercepted in Riga.

These new cases illustrate once again the benefits of international cooperation, including between EU authorities and third countries, in the fight against tobacco smuggling.

### **Background:**

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. OLAF investigates cases of customs fraud as they are financially damaging to the EU taxpayer and legitimate industry. OLAF has an explicit mandate to fight cigarette smuggling as part of the EU efforts to curb this phenomenon.

### **OLAF**

The mission of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) is threefold: it protects the financial interests of the European Union by investigating fraud, corruption and any other illegal activities; it detects and investigates serious matters relating to the discharge of professional duties by members and staff of the EU institutions and

bodies that could result in disciplinary or criminal proceedings; and it supports the EU institutions, in particular the European Commission, in the development and implementation of anti-fraud legislation and policies.

For further details:

**Alina BUREA**

Spokesperson

European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)

Phone: +32 2 295 73 36

E-mail: [olaf-media@ec.europa.eu](mailto:olaf-media@ec.europa.eu)

[http://ec.europa.eu/anti\\_fraud](http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud)