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PRESS RELEASE

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Operation ERMIS: 70 000 counterfeit goods seized in EU joint customs operation

Over 70 000 counterfeit goods were seized during a major Joint Customs Operation (JCO) code-named "ERMIS". The Operation focussed on postal and courier mail traffic, to identify fake products shipped through small consignments. JCO ERMIS was carried-out by the Greek Customs Administration and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), and also involved customs experts from the Commission, Member States, FYROM, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. The results of this operation were unveiled at a debriefing meeting in Athens and are published across Europe today.

Algirdas Šemeta, Commissioner responsible for Customs and Anti-Fraud, said: "*The ERMIS Operation shows, once again, the major added-value of working together to combat common risks. Counterfeit products put our consumers at risk and our businesses at a disadvantage. Strong cooperation, efficient information exchange and effective targeted actions, involving all enforcement authorities, is essential to tackle those who smuggle fakes. This Operation did just that, and the outcome shows the great results this yields.*"

JCO ERMIS was carried out in March 2014. Customs authorities performed intensified controls and exchange of intelligence on parcels coming into the EU from third countries, via mail. Within the course of the operation, over 70 000 counterfeit items were seized in 634 different seizures. The goods varied in nature from mobile phones, sunglasses, and small vehicle spare parts, to medicines and pharmaceutical products. Most goods were found to come from the Far East. Such counterfeit products can pose a risk to EU consumers, since they tend not to be produced in line with the relevant health and safety legislation. Moreover, counterfeit trade undermines legitimate businesses. An additional number of 210 seizures were made, but the goods were released by customs officials because of the lack of cooperation from rights-holders, who did not come to identify the goods and certify they were counterfeit. The participants to the operation recalled that the cooperation of private companies is essential to the success of such customs operations since only the rights-holders can certify that the goods seized are not authentic.

JCO ERMIS follows up on previous actions coordinated by OLAF (JCO FAKE, JCO SIROCCO and JCOs DIABOLO I and DIABOLO II) which aim to curb the smuggling of counterfeit goods. Such Joint Customs Operations help generate increased intelligence, stronger cross-border cooperation and more accurate targeting of smuggling risk areas. Furthermore, through the high number of seizures, the Joint Customs Operation once again helped avoid losses to the EU's and Member States' budgets in the form of evaded customs duties and taxes.

Background

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.

Useful links

For more information on OLAF, see: http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud/index_en.htm

For further details on previous JCOs, see: http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud/policy/joint-customs-operations/index_en.htm

Homepage of Commissioner Šemeta: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/semeta/index_en.htm

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