

# EPPO: Operational Activities – Reports from January to March 2022



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## News

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After having assumed its investigative and prosecutorial tasks in June 2021, the EPPO regularly informs the public of its operational activities. The activities reported in January/February/March 2022 include the following:

- On 22 March 2022, at the request of the Bulgarian European Delegated Prosecutor, [Bulgarian law enforcement carried out searches and seizures](#) against Bulgarian companies for suspected subsidy fraud. The companies allegedly belong to an organised crime group that unlawfully received EU funds for the support of small and medium-sized companies. Construction materials worth €6 million, documents and hardware were seized.
- On 16 March 2022, officers of the [Lithuanian Special Investigation Service conducted searches](#) in Klaipėda (Lithuania) and other locations in Lithuania against an organised group that allegedly illegally obtained EU funds (estimated to €200,000). The operation was conducted in the context of investigations led by the Lithuanian European Delegated Prosecutor against suspects for abuse of office, fraud and forgery of documents. EU money was received for construction works.
- On 15 March 2022, the [Guardia di Finanza of Savona \(Italy\) executed](#) an order by the pre-trial judge as applied for by the EPPO and seized several luxury vehicles worth €750,000. Investigations revealed that a man who formally resides in a South American country but permanently lives in Italy did not pay customs duties and VAT (approximately €250,000) when he introduced luxury and vintage cars and motorcycles into Italian territory. The investigations are led by the EPPO office in Torino for aggravated smuggling.
- On 15 March 2022, the EPPO saw the first operation in Portugal. The operation dubbed “[Operation Europe](#)” targeted smuggling of textiles and shoes from China to Europe through Portuguese territory. Led by two Portuguese and one investigative judge, several law enforcement officers conducted searches in private residences, lawyers’ offices, accounting firms and customs brokers in several locations in Portugal. The damage of the fraud scheme to the EU’s financial interests amounts to at least €600,000.
- On 9 March 2022, an [operation](#) in cooperation with the Carabinieri Command for Agri-Food Protection of Messina (Italy) resulted in the seizure of €200,000. The case concerns non-procurement fraud by two farmers who deceived about the size and ownership of the lands, and thus unlawfully received EU money.

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- On 23 February 2022, the EPPO in Rome, in cooperation with the Rome Customs Office, [seized nearly €350,000 in cash](#) from an Italian company. The company evaded customs duties and VAT on the import of surgical masks from China. It was revealed that a portion of the masks were branched off against the EU's duty free rules and that the masks did not comply with EU safety regulations, putting all users of the masks and patients at risk.
- On 15 February 2022, the EPPO [cracked down on an organized criminal group in Bulgaria](#). With the support of the Bulgarian police four suspects were detained and their homes and offices searched. The defendants are suspected of having made false statements in order to obtain funds from the European Social Fund and under a measure to overcome the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The exact damage is still being determined.
- On 7 February 2022, the Italian Customs and Monopolies Agency [seized €130,000 from a Sicilian company](#) as part of an EPPO investigation. This company imported e-bikes from China and falsely declared the country of origin as Malaysia, thus evading anti-dumping duties. The case was initiated by a report from OLAF. The defendant was charged with aggravated smuggling by the EPPO office in Palermo.
- On 4 February 2022, the EPPO informed of the results of [investigations carried out by the Hanover Customs Investigation Office](#) under the supervision of the EPPO office in Hamburg, Germany. The investigations have been conducted since 2021 and targeted a scheme of commercial and organised tax evasion with the import of luxury cars by several international criminal groups in Germany and Estonia. With the support of customs offices in Germany, 26 searches were carried out and vehicles with a total value of €3.6 million were seized. Investigations and actions also involved the EPPO offices in Estonia and Latvia; investigators from the Hanover Customs Investigation Office took part in search activities in Estonia. The estimated total tax loss amounts to at least €5 million.
- On 3 February 2022, the [EPPO office in Naples \(Italy\) led an operation](#) against four companies and two individuals. The case involves the import of disassembled e-bikes from China and Turkey and the false declaration of these parts instead of complete e-bikes. As a result, the fraudsters paid less VAT. The fraudsters also used shell companies in Turkey in order to hide the true origin from China, thus evading anti-dumping rules. The damage amounts to around €13 million.
- On 24 January 2022, a tobacco smuggling case investigated by the EPPO led to the [first indictment in Lithuania](#). The case involved two Lithuanian customs officials who assisted two citizens of the Republic of Belarus in smuggling cigarettes into EU territory. The estimated damage to the EU and Lithuanian budget is believed to be close to €10 million.
- On 20 January 2022, the [first indictment of an EPPO case in Bulgaria](#) was tried by the Specialised Criminal Court in Sofia. The case relates to bribery, in which a general expert working for the Bulgarian State Fund Agriculture (SFA), received money from a farmer, in order to accelerate the payments of EU subsidies. The verdict is expected in the coming months.
- On 11 January 2022, the [Slovak office of the EPPO conducted an operation](#) against four companies suspected of VAT and customs fraud in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The total damage is estimated at around €48 million. The fraud scheme was based on under-evaluation of import goods and the circumvention of customs duties.

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