

# EPPO's Operational Activities: July - September 2024



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**News**

This news item provides an overview of the EPPO's main operational activities from 1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024. It continues the periodic reports of recent issues (for the latest ones →[euclid 2/2024, 102-104](#) and →[euclid 1/2024, 20-21](#)) and is in reverse chronological order.

- 3 July 2024: Investigation "Ambrosia" of the EPPO in Lisbon (Portugal) dismantles an alleged €30 million VAT fraud ring trading in essential food products (including olive oil, cooking oil, and sugar). Over 230 law enforcement officers are deployed throughout Portugal, Spain, and France. On the operation day, 222 search warrants are executed, including 40 house searches, 46 company searches, searches of four law firms and 132 vehicles, leading to 11 arrest as well as the seizure of 43 cars and €120,000 in cash. The network, using a simulated international sales circuit, involved 102 companies based in Portugal, Spain, and in France. It had long been suspected of having made an undue profit of approximately €30 million, causing an equivalent damage to the Portuguese state and the EU budget.
- 11 July 2024: At the request of the EPPO in Naples (Italy), the Italian Financial Police (Guardia di Finanza) in Naples executes a **€1.3 million freezing order** against four companies and their respective legal representatives, who were suspected of fraud, embezzlement and money laundering. Based on fictitious data and forged documents, the Naples-based company with no operational headquarters, no employees, and no utility contracts, had obtained EU funding for two projects: one loan for "the development of e-commerce for SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) in foreign countries" with a total value of €300,000 (of which €150,000 was disbursed); the second project involved a €1.3 million grant for SMEs (the money was almost fully disbursed and financed by the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)).
- 12 July 2024: At the request of the EPPO in Milan (Italy), the Italian Financial Police (Guardia di Finanza) executes a €5,039,260 freezing order against a company suspected of major customs fraud involving the importation of **e-bikes from China**. The company is alleged to have evaded payment of anti-dumping duties, customs duties, and VAT amounting to more than €9.8 million by importing these e-bikes into the EU in parts and in separate consignments. The amount in the freezing order corresponds to the tax allegedly evaded.
- 15 July 2024: A fraud investigation of the EPPO in Turin (Italy) leads to the arrests of two suspects. In addition to the arrests, the Italian authorities execute a €1.3 million freezing order, seize five properties with a total value of over €1 million, and freeze five bank accounts with a total value of €213,000. The suspects had received loans guaranteed by the European Investment Fund **for the development of drones** for commercial use. In order to obtain these loans, the suspects allegedly submitted false balance sheets and falsified accounting documents.

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- 17 July 2024: Investigation "Easy Car" by the EPPO in Milan (Italy) leads to the arrest of two suspects and the execution of a freezing order against seven companies under investigation for a major intra-community VAT carousel fraud involving luxury cars. The suspects are alleged to have evaded €7.6 million in VAT payments on new car registrations by falsifying the origin of the vehicles.
- 19 July 2024: Investigations of the EPPO in Venice (Italy) uncover an alleged €8.8 million VAT carousel fraud involving the trade in [cleaning products and alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages](#). A variety of fraudulent tactics, including fake invoices, fictitious transactions, and missing traders, had been used to claim fraudulent VAT reimbursements from national tax authorities. Products were also on sale at artificially low prices, thereby undercutting legitimate competitors.
- 25 July 2024: Suspicions of procurement fraud, misappropriation of EU funds, and corruption prompt the EPPO in Nicosia (Cyprus) to launch an investigation into a project to create a [natural gas entry point for Cyprus](#). The construction of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) import terminal, which would allow Cyprus to connect to the wider European gas market, is costing €542 million, of which around €101 million are financed by the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) programme.
- 26 July 2024: The EPPO in Bratislava (Slovakia) opens an investigation into [attempted fraud of EU funds in connection with the construction of a waste treatment plant](#). A comparison between the project documents submitted for the planning permission procedure and those submitted for the grant application had revealed discrepancies contrary to the requirements set out in the call for grant applications.
- 26 August 2024: The EPPO in Sofia (Bulgaria) is investigating a €2.6 million EU-funded project to reconstruct [the water supply network and the water reservoir of a municipality in Bulgaria](#). Public officials from Bulgaria's State Fund for Agriculture are suspected of having made fraudulent arrangements with a mayor and the private companies to inflate the price of the works and overcharge the paying agency. The public officials are also alleged to have drawn up documentation containing false information, certifying that all the works were completed on time. EPPO investigators had uncovered evidence of fraud in the execution of the contract, which had been awarded to private companies.
- 29 August 2024: The EPPO in Vilnius (Lithuania) expands its investigation into a former assistant of a Lithuanian Member of the European Parliament (MEP) (→[eucrim 1/2024, 20-21](#), entry on 29 March 2024) to the MEP himself. The [former Lithuanian MEP](#) is now officially suspected of abuse of office, falsification and use of false documents, illegal acquisition, possession and use of an electronic document as well as the acquisition of high value foreign assets.
- 4 September 2024: The EPPO in Frankfurt am Main (Germany) is investigating three social enterprises that received more than €6.6 million in grants from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) for [projects to help unemployed people](#) with particular difficulties accessing the labour market. The five suspects, all managers and employees of the social enterprises, are alleged to have submitted documents containing false information on the allocation of staff to the projects in order to obtain a higher amount of funding for their companies. Employees were allegedly pressured to sign forms stating that they had worked on certain ESF projects when in fact they had not.
- 12 September 2024: The EPPO in Athens (Greece) is investigating a [€30 million VAT fraud and money-laundering scheme](#). To evade VAT, the suspects had set up a complex web of companies in Greece and other EU Member States (Cyprus and Slovakia) to trade small electronic goods through a fraudulent chain of missing traders. The investigation has also uncovered a number of fraudulent schemes involving additional VAT evasion and money laundering amounting to several million euros, which will be further investigated.
- 24 September 2024: At the request of the EPPO in Rome (Italy), the Italian Financial Police (Guardia di Finanza) of Giulianova (Teramo) executes a freezing order amounting to €114,000 against an Italian company, which operates wholesale trade of food and tobacco. The company was granted €228,000

funding from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) for the development of an e-commerce platform. The grant application was allegedly based on falsified financial statements. Half of the granted amount (€114,000) was already disbursed.

- 25 September 2024: The EPPO in Cluj-Napoca (Romania) has several public and private places searched based on an investigation into [procurement fraud](#), [forgery of documents](#) and [abuse of office](#). Under suspicion are several civil servants of the Maramureş County which received funding of €1 million under the RRF for the renovation of a public administration building.
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