

Europol and OLAF Crack Down on Sanctions Evasion



Cornelia Riehle, Thomas Wahl

News

To step up its support to EU Member States [combating sanctions evasion](#) in conjunction with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Europol has established a "Target Group Sanctions", a new team within its European Financial and Economic Crime Centre. Launched in November 2025, the target group aims to identify and disrupt criminal networks circumventing EU sanctions, leveraging Europol's intelligence, financial-tracing, and analytical capabilities.

In addition, Europol has teamed up with OLAF to [launch "Project Transporter"](#), which targets vehicle exports to third countries potentially destined for onward transfer to Russia and Belarus. This joint effort aims to counteract the increase in shipments enabled by forged documents and illicit financial practices. The project brings together specialists from EU Member States' customs, police, and financial crime services. The cooperation between Europol and OLAF reinforces the EU's collective response to sanctions circumvention. The project is part of EMPACT, the EU's instrument for structured multidisciplinary cooperation to fight serious international crime in line with pre-defined priorities. Customs fraud, including sanctions evasion, is one of EMPACT's priorities for the period 2026-2029 (→[eucrium 2/2025, 142](#)).

On 26 January 2026, OLAF reported on a [concrete successful operation](#) against vehicle transports to Russia. A coordinated law enforcement action revealed that over 760 vehicles originally destined for Turkey were actually moved to Russia. By carrying out extensive data analysis and cross-checking of customs, trade, and transport information, OLAF was able to reconstruct the transport chain, confirming the suspected circumvention of EU sanctions. The investigation led to criminal proceedings in three Member States.

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Preprint eucrium 2025, Vol. 20(4)

ISSN: 1862-6947

<https://eucrium.eu>



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The project is co-financed by the [Union Anti-Fraud Programme \(UAFP\)](#), managed by the [European Anti-Fraud Office \(OLAF\)](#).



Co-funded by
the European Union