

Hits against Illegal Tobacco Trade in 2020



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European Law Forum: Prevention • Investigation • Prosecution

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News

In a press release issued on 14 January 2021, OLAF took stock of [successful operations against illegal tobacco trade in 2020](#). In 20 operations, national customs and law enforcement authorities were able to seize nearly 370 million cigarettes that were foreseen for the black market. The potential loss of customs and excise duties and VAT is estimated at €74 million. OLAF supported the operations by providing vital information on the identification and tracking of lorries and/or containers loaded with contraband cigarettes and exchanging intelligence information in real time with EU Member States and third countries. The operations also revealed fraud and smuggling patterns: approximately 37% of the cigarettes were seized in non-EU countries, e.g., Albania, Kosovo, Malaysia, and Ukraine. The majority of the cigarettes originated from Asia (China, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia), but a reasonable share also came from Balkan and Eastern European countries (Montenegro, Belarus, Ukraine), Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.

OLAF Director-General *Ville Itälä* said: “Our joint efforts have not only helped save millions of euros in lost revenues and kept millions of contraband cigarettes off the market, they have also helped us get closer to the ultimate goal of identifying and closing down the criminal gangs behind this dangerous and illegal trade.”

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