

OLAF's Operational Work January-June 2024

Thomas Wahl

News

This news item summarises OLAF's operational work in the first half of 2024 (January to June 2024) in reverse chronological order. It follows the reports on operations supported by OLAF in → [euCRIM 4/2023, 318](#).

- 26 June 2024: OLAF investigators supported Hungarian customs in tracking down a site in Budapest where [counterfeit air fresheners](#) from Turkey were stored. 140,000 pieces of counterfeit air fresheners are found, with an estimated value of approximately €300,000. Counterfeit aerosols not only damage the budget but are also a danger to health and the environment.
- 4 June 2024: Alerted by OLAF, Dutch authorities succeed in one of the [most important strikes against the import of illicit fluorinated greenhouse gases](#) (F-gases). Dutch authorities stop three trucks from Turkey that were transporting over 3,500 cylinders, containing approximately 40 tonnes of F-gases without the necessary permits and quota. Having a high impact on global warming, the import of F-gases into the EU is strictly regulated and OLAF constantly analyses and passes on information and intelligence on suspicious shipments and operators.
- 14 April 2024: OLAF takes stock of [operations against tobacco smuggling in 2023](#). International operations involving OLAF led to the seizure of 616 million illicit cigarettes, 140 tonnes of raw tobacco and 6 tonnes of water pipe tobacco. OLAF's report also informs of trends and patterns of tobacco smuggling. Seizures of illicit cigarettes inside the EU, for instance, show that traffickers and illegal producers increasingly divide production into smaller units in order to move their tools and goods faster if raided by law enforcement.
- 13 February 2024: OLAF and Europol informs the public of [operation SHIELD IV](#). Operation SHIELD IV was carried out between April and October 2023 targeting misused or counterfeit medicines, doping substances, illegal food or sport supplements and counterfeit COVID medical supplies (for previous SHIELD operations → [euCRIM 4/2022, 234-235](#)). The operation involved law enforcement, judicial, customs, medical and anti-doping authorities from 30 countries across three continents that were supported/coordinated by Europol, OLAF, Eurojust, INTERPOL, the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO), Frontex, and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). Operation SHIELD IV carried out nearly 4000 inspections and led to criminal charges of 1284 individuals. Four underground labs were dismantled and over 90 websites shut down. Seizures worth €64 million included: 186,754 tablets, 193,759 packages and 350.32 kg of erectile dysfunction medications, as well as 21,888 tablets and 1016 vials of anabolics.
- 7 February 2024: With OLAF's support, Polish Customs [dismantle a missing trader fraud scheme involving the trade in e-bikes](#) from China. By falsifying import documentation and abusing transit pro-

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cedures, the e-bikes were smuggled to warehouses in Poland where they were sold to European customers via online platforms with high profits. The operation tracked down 20,000 e-bikes. The estimated damage to the EU and national budgets is at least €8 million of anti-dumping and countervailing duties and €4 million of VAT.

- 6 February 2024: OLAF and the Italian Customs (Agenzia delle dogane e dei monopoli – ADM) report on the [Joint Customs Operation “Bellerophon”](#). The operation uncovered a missing trader fraud scheme that evaded VAT of more than €18 million. The traders illegally used VAT exemptions when importing goods (mainly textiles, footwear and toys) from China to Greece with Italy as the final destination. Operation Bellerophon involved nine Member States and was carried out in June 2023. Follow-up investigations lasted until January 2024. During the operation, customs authorities also seized 27,000 counterfeit hats and clothing items, as well as 4 million cigarette packs.
 - 4 January 2024: Thanks to OLAF’s supports [an organised criminal group producing and selling illicit medicinal products](#) is dismantled. Polish law enforcement authorities raid and shut down factories and warehouses of the group, and seize several tons of falsified medicinal products and components necessary for their production. Nine suspects are arrested. Probably having operated for over a year, the group marketed the products, mainly anabolic steroids, via websites. OLAF supported the operation by having provided expert advice and liaised with the national authorities in other EU Member States concerned, thus enabling to connect the dots. The estimated amount of the confiscated material amounts to 50 million zloty, equivalent to around €11.5 million.
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