

OLAF's Operational Work July-December 2024

Thomas Wahl

News

This news item summarises OLAF's operational work in the second half of 2024 in reverse chronological order. It follows the reports on operations supported by OLAF in the first half of 2024 published in → [eucriM 1/2024, 17-18](#).

- 20 December 2024: Information on the second edition of Operation BELENOS is made public. During two weeks in November 2024, [Operation BELENOS II](#) targeted illicit financial flows linked to money laundering, terrorism financing and organised crime (for the first edition → [eucriM 4/2023, 318](#)). According to first estimations, over €2.7 million in cash and valuable items such as gold and jewelry with a value exceeding €1.7 million were seized. The law enforcement action included checks of over 500 cash movements, the inspection of several postal purchases and the control of over 300 travelers. OLAF provided financial, analytical and technical support to the Member States; it also ensured the secure exchange of information during the operation by using its Virtual Operations Coordination Unit (VOCU) application. Operation BELENOS II was led by the French customs authorities and involved customs authorities from 23 EU Member States.
- 20 November 2024: OLAF informs of the results of the Joint Customs [Operation KHIONE](#) that aimed at disrupting the illegal trade in refrigerant gases smuggled into the EU. The Operation ran from May to October 2024 and prevented that more than 400,000 tons of F-gases entered the EU market. The Operation was coordinated by OLAF and involved 16 EU Member States, Türkiye and Ukraine.
- 28 October 2024: In the joint police-customs [Operation DECOY](#), supported by Europol and OLAF, law enforcement authorities from 18 countries seize over €14 million in counterfeit money. The operation targeted the disruption of organised criminal networks distributing fake banknotes and coins via postal services across Europe. It led to the seizure of 174 parcels containing counterfeit currency and the interception of a total of 148,130 counterfeit items, including 134,949 euro banknotes and coins, 9,186 British pounds, and 3,595 US dollars. Europol and OLAF supported the operation by facilitating intelligence-sharing, helping to detect suspect parcels, and refining risk indicators for future efforts to combat counterfeit currency distribution.
- 23 October 2024: Europol and OLAF publish the [result of the 2024 Operation OPSON](#) (meanwhile in its thirteenth run), which tackles food fraud, the counterfeiting of food and beverages, and the abuse of geographical indications (for the previous operation → [eucriM 4/2024, 318-319](#) with further references). Involving authorities in 29 countries across Europe as well as food and beverage producers from the private sector, Operation OPSON XIII resulted in the seizure of around 22,000 tonnes of food and around 850,000 litres of (mostly alcoholic) beverages. 11 criminal networks were dismantled and 104 arrest warrants issued. One of the trends detected was that fraudsters are increasingly selling

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expired food. Olive oil and wines were among the products which were illegally traded bypassing protected designations of origin.

- 22 October 2024: Thanks to intelligence provided by OLAF, [Dutch authorities confiscated four containers filled with nearly 4,800 cylinders of F-gases](#) at the port of Rotterdam. This is the largest-ever seizure of F-gases in the Netherlands. Given that the black market in F-gases (hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs) is growing due to strict import quotas in the EU, OLAF has focused on monitoring the international traffic of F-gases to the EU from third countries.
 - 15 October 2024: OLAF assists Spanish law enforcement authorities which [crack down a Spanish company involved in the illegal export of chemical products to Russia](#). The Spanish authorities seize 13 tons of chemical substances and arrest four persons. The operation reveals a criminal network that circumvented EU sanctions against Russia (following its invasion of Ukraine) by rerouting shipments of chemical products via Armenia and Kyrgyzstan to Russia. OLAF's assistance is part of the Joint Sanctions Enforcement Operation that OLAF has been running since July 2023 to enforce trade sanctions against Russia.
 - 3 October 2024: Romanian authorities [seize 1,000 litres of counterfeit pesticides](#) with a value of over €600,000. The products were manufactured outside the EU and seemingly smuggled from Eastern Europe to Romania. Two Ukrainian nationals allegedly involved in the smuggling are arrested. The operation was supported by OLAF which provided intelligence and informed about the suspicious shipment.
 - 12 August 2024: A joint operation led by OLAF, the Spanish National Police, the Spanish Tax Agency Customs Surveillance and the Italian Guardia di Finanza leads to the [seizure of over 900,000 counterfeit razor blades](#) of a well-know brand. A criminal network imported the counterfeit products from Chinese suppliers and distributed them to wholesalers in Spain and Italy who sold the goods as genuine products of the brand. OLAF supported the operation *inter alia* by tracking the suspicious shipments, identifying the recipient companies across the EU, informing the involved countries, and coordinating the investigations related to the case.
 - 1 August 2024: OLAF informs about the preliminary results of customs [operations against counterfeit products related to the EURO 2024 Football Championship](#) in Germany and the Olympic Games in Paris. Concerted actions led by OLAF, the French customs and the German Customs Investigation Office (ZKA) have already led to over 630,000 items seized, including sportswear, sports shoes, toys, and sporting equipment. As a result, not only illegitimate businesses but also dangers to the citizens' health and safety could be avoided.
 - 17 July 2024: An OLAF investigation leads to the successful [dismantlement of a criminal network that established a large-scale smuggling scheme with counterfeit premium vodka and whisky](#). Almost 400,000 bottles with an estimated value of €14 million were seized. OLAF acted as the main coordination point for exchange of information among various EU and non-EU authorities, collected, analysed and disseminated critical operational intelligence related to the smuggling network, and provided specialised knowledge and technical assistance.
 - 4 July 2024: [OLAF supports "Operation Dashboard"](#). The Operation targeted a criminal network that imported scrap vehicles from the United Kingdom to Spain by circumventing the EU rules on hazardous waste. The criminal activities also involved Germany and France. The operation, executed by the Spanish Guardia Civil, led to seven detainees and five individuals under investigation for charges that include alleged crimes against natural resources and the environment, falsification of certificates, money laundering, tax fraud, and membership in a criminal group. It is estimated that over 600,000 kilo of scrap has been illegally imported into the EU since January 2021. OLAF joined the dots and brought the national law enforcement authorities of the involved countries together.
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