

Operation between EU and UK Reveals Excise Duty Fraud with Cigarettes



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European Law Forum: Prevention • Investigation • Prosecution

News

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On 21 December 2020, OLAF and Europol reported on a successful European-wide joint operation against fraudulent trade in cigarettes. The operation took place in November 2020 and involved 15 EU Member States and the UK. Europol and OLAF facilitated the operation by intelligence analyses, providing secure channels for information exchange and giving operational expertise. Law enforcement authorities were able to detect a fraud scheme of excise duty evasion. A network of fraudsters diverted cigarettes declared for export or intra-EU delivery into the black market. Under VAT and excise suspension the cigarettes were distributed illegally without payment of the taxes and duties. The operation resulted in the arrest of 17 suspects, and the seizure of 67 million cigarettes and 2.6 tonnes of tobacco worth €35.82 million. The most significant seizures were made in Lithuania (28.75 million) and the UK (9 million). In total, the potential tax loss was estimated at €30 million.

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