

Operation Opson XII: 8000 Tonnes of Illicit Food and Beverages Seized

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News

On 10 October 2023, OLAF and Europol informed of the results from the twelfth consecutive operation OPSON, which was carried out between December 2022 and May 2023. Operation OPSON targets counterfeit and substandard food and beverages, and food fraud in general; it is carried out every year (for operations in previous years → [eucrim 4/2022, 235](#); [eucrim 3/2021, 143](#); [eucrim 2/2020, 80](#) and [eucrim 2/2019, 90](#)).

Targeted actions coordinated by OLAF led to the seizure of 6 million litres of counterfeit, substandard or contraband alcoholic beverages, wine and beer.

According to [Europol's press release](#), 8000 tonnes of illicit products (food and beverages) were seized, 400 inspections carried out, a record of 143 arrest warrants issued during the operational activities, 119 individuals reported to judicial authorities, and six criminal networks disrupted.

Operation OPSON XII focused on the relabelling of spoiled or expired food – a trend that emerged as a consequence of the COVID-19 crises. The misuse of protected food names was also the focus of operational activities.

Europol provided several examples of food fraud in the 25 countries involved in the operation. For example, law enforcement authorities were able to disrupt a criminal organisation, led by a Lithuanian citizen, which recycled spoiled and expired food and traded the products in France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. The operation led to the seizure of more than 1.5 million packages of food. Checks in the United Kingdom identified, for instance, mislabelling and misuse of protected food names in restaurants and by individual retailers, such as feta, Parmigiano Reggiano and Grana Padano cheeses, and meats such as Prosciutto di Parma.

Operation OPSON XII was coordinated by Europol, OLAF, the European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE), European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI), the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO), and Interpol. It also involved national food regulatory authorities and private entities.

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