

Successful OLAF Operations Against Smuggling



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European Law Forum: Prevention • Investigation • Prosecution

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News

In February 2020, OLAF informed the public about several successful actions against illicit trade and trafficking.

- With the support of OLAF, Belgian and Malaysian customs authorities were able to **seize a record sum of nearly 200 million smuggled cigarettes**. After the Belgian authorities successfully seized around 135 million cigarettes in Antwerp, OLAF launched an investigation against the smugglers and the routeing. Over 62,6 million cigarettes had been falsely declared and were waiting for export from a free trade zone in Malaysia. After having been alerted by OLAF, the Malaysian authorities seized the containers on 3 February 2020, preventing the cigarettes from being shipped to the EU. If the cigarettes had been successfully brought to the markets in the EU, OLAF estimates that financial loss to the EU/Member State budgets would have been €50 million.
- In close cooperation with OLAF, the Italian Customs Agency **seized 12.5 tonnes of fluorinated greenhouse gases**, so-called hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), on 5-6 February 2020. HFCs replace ozone-depleting substances and are often used in refrigerated units. Although they do not deplete the ozone layer, they have a high global warming potential. The illicit import of such gases became one of OLAF's operational priorities, in line with the top priority on the agenda of the new Commission under *Ursula von der Leyen*, who announced plans to make Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050: "The European Green Deal".
- On 12 February 2020, OLAF reported a **successful strike against the smuggling of fake spirits**. Shortly before Christmas 2019, Dutch customs authorities seized 47,000 bottles of counterfeit rum, an equivalent of 10 containers. The final destination of the seized bottles was Spain. OLAF investigators uncovered the modus operandi of the rum smugglers and located a suspicious warehouse in the Netherlands. OLAF also coordinated the action between the Dutch and Spanish customs authorities. The value of the counterfeit rum is estimated to be €2 million.

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