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OLAF helps seize 360 tons of illegal or counterfeit pesticides in Operation Silver Axe III

Operation Silver Axe III, coordinated by Europol with support from the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), led to the seizure of 360 tons of illegal or counterfeit pesticides. Numerous police, customs and plant protection authorities from 27 countries participated in the Operation (*).

The Acting Director-General of OLAF, Mr. Nicholas Ilett, said: "The smuggling of pesticides poses a threat to the food chain, to farmers and ultimately to consumers because it allows dangerous products to reach our market. Smuggling occurs through complex contraband operations run by criminal networks. It is very difficult for a single authority to intercept smugglers. OLAF brings added value by providing our operational partners with key information on the movement of smuggled goods across the EU. I congratulate EUROPOL and the other participants for this success. These seizures illustrate how crucial international cooperation is in the fight against the illegal trade of counterfeit products."

During the operational phase (April-May 2018), OLAF selected 181 suspicious shipments of pesticides coming from third countries (mainly China), that were either declared as being in transit in the EU or declared for export from the EU to another third country (Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Turkey). These suspicious shipments were notified to the participating national and third country customs authorities by OLAF directly or via EUROPOL.

For example, with the support of the Ukrainian authorities and the OLAF Liaison Officer in Kiev, OLAF asked Hungarian and Slovak Customs to intercept a suspicious consignment of 20.400 kg pesticides (thiamethoxam 350 g/l) on its way from China to Hungary via Ukraine. The shipment containing unmarked packaging (no indication of producer, country of origin, trade name) was successfully seized at Szolnok by Hungarian customs officers (NTCA) and the experts from the National Food Chain Safety Office (NFCSSO). The real customs value of the shipment exceeded 240.000 USD. The retail value of the genuine pesticide would exceed 1 Million USD. In addition, OLAF also contributed to stopping another suspicious shipment of 5.4 tons of pesticide (thiacloprid) initially transported under a customs transit regime from Turkey to Germany and later on from Germany to the Czech Republic.

Operation SILVER AXE III entailed checks at major seaports, airports and land borders, as well as production and repacking facilities in the participating countries. For further details on the Operation, please see the [Europol press release](#) issued today.

(*) Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy (co-leader), Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Romania, Poland, Portugal, The Netherlands (the action leader), United Kingdom as well as Australia, Moldova, Serbia, Switzerland and Ukraine.

Background:

The trade of counterfeit products results in vast illicit profits and huge losses of tax revenues for the EU and its Member States. The smuggling of counterfeit products harms the European economy, damages legitimate business and stifles innovation, putting many jobs at risk in Europe. Counterfeiting also poses serious risks to the environment and health and safety.

OLAF is competent to conduct investigations related to the smuggling of counterfeit goods, thereby protecting the EU and its Member States from customs and tax revenue losses. OLAF particularly focuses on the smuggling of potentially dangerous products.

OLAF mission, mandate and competences:

OLAF's mission is to detect, investigate and stop fraud with EU funds.

OLAF fulfils its mission by:

- carrying out independent investigations into fraud and corruption involving EU funds, so as to ensure that all EU taxpayers' money reaches projects that can create jobs and growth in Europe;
- contributing to strengthening citizens' trust in the EU Institutions by investigating serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU Institutions;
- developing a sound EU anti-fraud policy.

In its independent investigative function, OLAF can investigate matters relating to fraud, corruption and other offences affecting the EU financial interests concerning:

- all EU expenditure: the main spending categories are Structural Funds, agricultural policy and rural development funds, direct expenditure and external aid;
- some areas of EU revenue, mainly customs duties;
- suspicions of serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU institutions.

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