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OLAF IN MAJOR OPERATION AGAINST COUNTERFEITERS

18 February 2015 Press release A clandestine factory of counterfeit shampoo was dismantled, two individuals arrested and 229,000 bottles of counterfeit shampoo as well as 805 kg of chemical products were seized in early February in Spain thanks to information provided by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). The successful operation was the result of cooperation between OLAF, Spanish and Dutch customs authorities and the legitimate rights-holder.

The counterfeit shampoo, which was imported from China in bulk and bottled in clandestine production plants in Spain, does not comply with the EU safety and sanitary requirements for such products. It was placed on the EU market through a very complex setup run by criminal networks operating across several EU Member States.

The Director-General of OLAF, Mr Giovanni Kessler said: "It is very difficult for a single authority to intercept such well-organised, international fraudsters. OLAF brings added value by providing our operational partners with key information on the movement of such goods across the EU. I congratulate the Spanish customs authorities on this success and also thank the Dutch customs authorities and the shampoo brand owner for their cooperation and support to OLAF." OLAF is competent to conduct investigations related to counterfeit goods that enter the EU through its external borders. The trade of such products generates vast illicit profits for fraudsters and causes huge losses of tax revenues for the EU and its Member States.

In this case, OLAF had received information from the French customs authorities of a seizure in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, of 240,000 bottles of counterfeit shampoo allegedly destined for the EU market. OLAF was further informed of additional seizures of counterfeit shampoo in three other Member States amounting to over 300,000 bottles. Following a careful analysis of the available information, OLAF identified a vast number of shipments of this counterfeit shampoo, imported into the EU by the same companies in the United Arab Emirates involved in the initial seizures. In close cooperation with the customs authorities through the port of Rotterdam, all the specific information related to the identified shipments was provided by OLAF and distributed to all the Member States involved, with a request for further action. The legitimate rights-holder, whose products had been counterfeited also provided support. Following receipt of OLAF's information and request, the Spanish customs authorities reacted immediately. They succeeded in ensuring the successful seizure of counterfeit shampoo labels as well as of a potential harmful product and they dismantled a clandestine production plant in Malaga.

The Spanish customs authorities arrested a German and Kazakh citizen and they have initiated a criminal investigation. For further details on the Spanish seizure, see the press release by the Spanish customs authorities.

CIGARETTE SMUGGLERS' PLANS THWARTED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES WITH OLAF SUPPORT

25 February 2015 Press release International cigarette smugglers suffered two major blows in January.

In two operations coordinated by the European Anti-Fraud Office (Olaf), National Customs Services seized nearly 15 million smuggled cigarettes.

In a first case, OLAF received valuable information from the Turkish customs according to which smugglers intended to ship a load of smuggled counterfeit cigarettes through the port of Haifa in

Israel. This information came following a similar earlier seizure made by the Turkish customs in the port of Mersin. OLAF immediately informed Israeli customs services. On 16 January 2015, a special customs unit in Haifa was able to seize 10.2 million counterfeit Gauloises cigarettes which will now be destroyed. In addition to delivering a blow to international smugglers, the action coordinated by OLAF may have also averted losses to EU revenues since it is suspected that the cigarettes could have been ultimately destined for the EU market.

In a second case, a container with 4.2 million smuggled cigarettes was seized in the port of Riga on 21 January 2015. Based on information provided by OLAF, Spanish and Dutch customs authorities were able to track this container that had travelled across Europe and had been transhipped in the port of Rotterdam before being finally intercepted in Riga. These new cases illustrate once again the benefits of international cooperation, including between EU authorities and third countries, in the fight against tobacco smuggling.

Background: Cigarette smuggling causes huge yearly losses to Member States and the EU in evaded customs duties and taxes. Smuggled tobacco respects no rules and poses great risks to both consumers and businesses. It undermines anti-smoking and public health campaigns and violates the strict rules that the EU and Member States have on manufacturing, distribution and sale. OLAF investigates cases of customs fraud as they are financially damaging to the EU taxpayer and legitimate industry. OLAF has an explicit mandate to fight cigarette smuggling as part of the EU efforts to curb this phenomenon.

OLAF The mission of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) is threefold: it protects the financial interests of the European Union by investigating fraud, corruption and any other illegal activities; it detects and investigates serious matters relating to the discharge of professional duties by members and staff of the EU institutions and bodies that could result in disciplinary or criminal proceedings; and it supports the EU institutions, in particular the European Commission, in the development and implementation of anti-fraud legislation and policies.