

A spice worth its weight in gold: a multi-million euros fake saffron trafficking scheme uncovered

The Spanish company was using a complex scheme to launder the criminal profits by simulating transactions across Europe

Europol supported the Spanish authorities in targeting an organised crime group laundering millions of euros of illegal profits coming from the trafficking of substandard saffron. The criminal network mixed real saffron with herbs and chemicals to increase their margins before exporting it. More than 500 shipments of this adulterated saffron have been identified, worth an estimated amount of €10 million.

The criminal network laundered their criminal proceeds through multiple bank transfers emanating from a Spanish company to different companies across the EU pretending to having bought this saffron.

These companies were not in the import-export business, which raised suspicions. The investigation into the transactions revealed a complex trade-based money laundering scheme set-up across the EU. The criminal network also used carriers to transport large amount of cash derived from the criminal business. The carriers were controlled by money brokers operating in the EU and with connections in non-EU countries acting as nodes in the hawala network.

- The action day on 25 February in Spain led to:
- 17 arrests
- Seizures including: 7 luxury cars and watches, gold and jewellery, 400kg of saffron threads, machines for saffron counterfeiting and €14 500 in cash

Europol supported the operation by facilitating information exchange and providing analytical support. On the action day, Europol deployed two experts to Spain to provide technical and analytical expertise and cross-check in real time operational information against Europol's databases and provide leads to investigators in the field.

Headquartered in The Hague, the Netherlands, we support the 27 EU Member States in their fight against terrorism, cybercrime and other serious and organised forms of crime. We also work with many non-EU partner states and international organisations. From its various threat assessments to its intelligence-gathering and operational activities, Europol has the tools and resources it needs to do its part in making Europe safer.



In 2010 the European Union set up a [four-year Policy Cycle](#) to ensure greater continuity in the fight against serious international and organised crime. In 2017 the Council of the EU decided to continue the EU Policy Cycle for the 2018 – 2021 period. It aims to tackle the most significant threats posed by organised and serious international crime to the EU. This is achieved by improving and strengthening cooperation between the relevant services of EU Member States, institutions and agencies, as well as non-EU countries and organisations, including the private sector where relevant. [Money laundering](#) is one of the priorities for the Policy Cycle.