

Cigarette smugglers' activities up in smoke after illegal factories dismantled across Europe

On 21 January, close to 14 million of cigarettes and 186 tonnes of cut tobacco were seized during an action day carried out in Belgium and the Netherlands. All 7 workers present in the illegal factory in the Netherlands were also arrested. The illegal factory dismantled in Jemeppe-sur-Sambre in Belgium was one of the largest ever uncovered to date (6 000m²).

This sweep follows an investigation led by the Belgian Customs (Algemene Administratie van Douane en Accijnzen / Administration Générale des Douanes et Accises) with the support of the Polish Police Central Bureau of Investigation (Centralne Biuro Śledcze Policji), the Dutch Fiscal Information and Investigation Service (Fiscale Inlichtingen- en Opsporingsdienst – FIOD) and Europol.

Details of the seizures:

- In Jemeppe-sur-Sambre (province of Namur, Belgium): 24 tonnes of cut tobacco and 100 000 cigarettes, alongside production and packaging machinery;
- In Awans (province of Liège, Belgium) : 90 tonnes of cut tobacco;
- In Herstal (province of Liège, Belgium): 9 million cigarettes, alongside 3 lorries;
- In Hoogstraten (province of Antwerp, Belgium): 4.5 million cigarettes, alongside production equipment;
- In Dronten (province of Flevoland, the Netherlands): 72 tonnes of cut tobacco.

All these counterfeit cigarettes were presumably destined for the UK market.

These seizures follow those of a separate operation in Spain earlier on in the month. On 4 January, the Spanish National Police (Policia Nacional) and Spanish Tax Agency (Agencia Tributaria), targeted a tobacco smuggling network operating in Cordoba and Seville. This operation was carried out once again with the support with the Polish Central Bureau of Investigation, the Polish National Revenue Agency (Krajowa Administracja Skarbowa) and Europol.

12 individuals were arrested (Spanish, Ukrainian and Belarussian nationals) and 910 000 cigarettes seized, alongside 4.2 tonnes of filters and 10.3 tonnes of cut tobacco and various pieces of machinery and vehicles. The total value of the seized goods exceeds €1 million.

Europol support

Europol's Analysis Project Smoke within the [European Economic and Financial Crime Centre \(EFECC\)](#) supported both these investigations. This team is

dedicated to investigating the unlawful manufacturing and smuggling of excise goods.

AP Smoke facilitated the international cooperation between the involved countries by providing a secure platform of communication, running cross-checks against Europol's databases and providing analytical and operational expertise to tailor the respective investigation strategies.



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. [Excise fraud](#) is one of the priorities for the Policy Cycle.