

Roll-your-own tobacco smuggling network dismantled in Portugal and Spain with Europol's support

With the support of Europol, the Portuguese Republican National Guard (Guardia Nacional Republicana) and the Spanish Civil Guard (Guardia Civil) with the cooperation of the Spanish Customs Surveillance Service (Servicio de Vigilancia Aduanera), have dismantled an organised crime group involved in large-scale tobacco smuggling.

The criminals would illegally import from Spain to Portugal large quantities of tobacco leaves and stripes, destined to produce both cigarettes and tobacco for roll-your-own cigarettes which were subsequently distributed onto the Portuguese black market.

On 24 June, an action day conducted simultaneously in both countries has resulted in:

- 59 property searches carried out in Portugal, and 4 in Spain;
- 8 individuals arrested, all Spanish and Portuguese nationals aged between 33 and 49 years old;
- The seizure of 11 tonnes of tobacco leaf and fine-cut tobacco, alongside 90 000 manufactured illegal cigarettes and 186 500 cigarette filters.

The amount of tobacco seized is enough to produce some 11 million cigarettes, worth €2,7 million in Portugal.

The criminals were managing the import of the tobacco via several companies established with the sole purpose of committing excise fraud. Cutting and processing facilities had been set up in Spain, from where the tobacco was shipped to Portugal where it was stored in different warehouses until it was distributed further.

The revenue loss generated by these tobacco products illegally imported from Spain to Portugal is estimated at more than € 2 million.

Europol support

Europol's support was instrumental in the success of the case:

- Europol brought together the national investigators on both sides who have since been working closely together to establish a joint strategy to bring down this network.
- Since then, Europol has provided continuous intelligence development and analysis to support the field investigators.
- Experts from Europol's [European Financial and Economic Crime Centre](#) (EFECC) were deployed in Lisbon and Salamanca to assist the Portuguese and Spanish authorities with the cross-checking of operational

information.

This action day was carried out in the framework of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT).



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.