



Counterfeit tobacco products worth EUR 17 million seized in France

Information shared with Europol led to the targeting of the first factory for counterfeit cigarettes ever found in France

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On 12 January, more than 60 officers from the French National Gendarmerie (Gendarmerie Nationale) raided a location in France, which was found to be an underground factory for counterfeit tobacco. The investigation was initiated as a result of information shared with France by Europol at the end of 2022.





During the raids last week, the French officers arrested nine suspects, most of them Moldovan nationals. The gendarmes discovered a quasi-industrial set-up for the production of counterfeit cigarettes in large quantities. They discovered three separate zones in the targeted factory. One of the zones was dedicated to the processing of raw tobacco to produce boxes of cigarettes labelled as well-known brands sold on the legal market. Another zone was dedicated to the storage of large boxes of counterfeit cigarettes. The third zone was used as a living area for the workers with some 15 beds, a kitchen and a living room. This allowed the workers to live at the factory, completely cut off from the external world.

During the raids, the officers seized more than 100 tonnes of illegal products including 55 tonnes of cigarettes in boxes (19.4 million cigarettes and 15 tonnes of cut tobacco), 50 tonnes of packaging materials such as paper, filters and labels, as well as 18 tonnes of waste from the cigarette production process. The estimated value of the seized tobacco is about EUR 17 million. Further to this, the officers seized vehicles, factory machinery and electronic equipment. The seizures also included over a tonne of food products, later donated to food banks. The seized tobacco and counterfeit products were destroyed.

Europol facilitated the information exchange and provided specialised analytical support. On the action day, Europol supported the French authorities by cross-checking operational information against Europol's databases in real-time and providing leads to investigators in the field.

In 2020, Europol created the European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC) to increase synergies between economic and financial investigations and to strengthen its ability to support law enforcement authorities in effectively combating major criminal threats.

Headquartered in The Hague, the Netherlands, Europol supports the 27 EU Member States in their fight against terrorism, cybercrime, and other serious and organised crime forms. Europol also works 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.