

SMOKED OUT: ONE OF THE LARGEST ILLEGAL CIGARETTE FACTORIES DISMANTLED IN THE NETHERLANDS

13 Oct 2020

[Press Release](#)

Thirteen suspects arrested in raid, 3.6 million cigarettes and 32 tonnes of tobacco seized



On 7 October, the investigation service of the Dutch tax authorities, FIOD (Fiscale Inlichtingen en OpsporingsDienst), raided an illegal tobacco factory in West-Betuwe, south of Utrecht. It is one of the largest illegal cigarette factories uncovered in the Netherlands. The factory was in full operation when law enforcement entered the premises. Thirteen suspects were arrested comprising mostly of nationals from Eastern Europe. Investigators seized 3.6 million cigarettes and 32 000 kilos of tobacco along with packaging material, cigarette paper, filters and glue. The tax loss prevented to the Dutch state revenue for the illegal production is estimated at €6 million.

Supported by Europol, this operation is the result of cross-border cooperation between the Dutch authorities and Ukrainian State Border Guard Service.

ILLEGAL MACHINERY ALL IN ONE FACILITY

In general, illegally processing and producing tobacco is dispersed across multiple facilities so criminals can spread the risk. In this case, the entire production cycle took place in one factory. The factory was located in a rural warehouse allowing the criminals to go unnoticed with their illegal activities. Dutch authorities estimated that the machinery could potentially produce one million cigarettes a day. The production is believed to have been destined for the black market in countries where the retail price of cigarettes is high. The factory is presumed to have produced 18 million illegal cigarettes seized abroad in recent months.

TACKLING THE ILLEGAL SUPPLY OF TOBACCO AND EXCISE FRAUD

Europol's Analysis Project Smoke dedicated to investigating the unlawful manufacturing and smuggling of excise goods supported the investigation. The exchange of information between law enforcement authorities and the analysis of operational data contributed to the identification of the potential location of the factory. Links established with recent seizures of tobacco in other countries helped further the investigation.

FIOD is also an active member of the ongoing special operational taskforce set up in 2018 between Europol and Member States to tackle top organised crime groups facilitating the supply of tobacco, machinery, skilled workers and non-tobacco material to illicit factories.



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 of the Policy Cycle.

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