

## JCPO ATHENA III



### Press release

#### Joint Customs Police Operation “Athena III”

##### **Why was this operation carried out?**

According to the Stockholm Programme - an Open and Secure Europe Serving and Protecting Citizens - security in the EU should be further improved to protect the lives and safety of EU citizens and to tackle organised crime, terrorism and other threats. It also stipulates that law enforcement cooperation should be strengthened in order to make Europe more secure. The Internal Security Strategy for the European Union: "Towards a European Security Model" also underlines the need for more effective European law enforcement cooperation. The Joint Customs and Police operation JCPO Athena III is expected to contribute to strengthening such cooperation.

##### **Who organized this JCPO?**

The operation was an initiative of the Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union (1 January – 30 June 2012) between the Danish National Tax and Customs Administration, the Danish National Police and the Ministry of Justice. France and Spain were co-runners in this joint operation.

##### **When?**

The JCPO took place from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2012.

**What was targeted during this operation?**

The JCPO Athena III targeted cash couriering, including criminal investigations in cases where EU and Member States' laws on the declaration and transportation of large amounts of cash were violated.

The objective of the Council Regulation (EC) No 515/1997 is to strengthen the fight against fraud and against any other illegal activity to the detriment of the Community's interests. The Regulation also provides the legal basis for specific activities of the Member States and the Commission, such as the special watch of goods, means of transport, warehouses and persons, including in the area of the fight against counterfeit goods.

In the fight against money laundering and terrorist financing, in accordance with Regulation (EC) n° 1889/2005 of the Council and the European Parliament on controls of cash entering or leaving the Community, competent authorities have been empowered to carry out controls on natural persons, their baggage and means of transport to check compliance with the obligation to declare cash.

The Naples II Convention signed in Brussels on 18 December 1997 also provides the possibility to assure appropriate follow-up actions in conjunction with law enforcement authorities for specific forms of cooperation, namely for exchange of information, investigation and special forms of cooperation.

**Who participated?**

26 Member States participated in the operation as well as the candidate countries Croatia, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Montenegro and Serbia and the 3<sup>rd</sup> countries Norway, Morocco and Switzerland. In addition to this, four international organizations participated in the operation, namely the EU Commission (OLAF and TAXUD), Europol, INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization (WCO).

**What were the tasks of the international organizations?**

Europol played a vital role in this operation: they produced a pre-operational risk analysis report (based on more than 70,000 records provided by the participating countries) identifying cash couriering routes and courier profiles throughout the EU.

In addition, Europol deployed the mobile office during the operational phase and suspect cash-couriers were cross checked against their databases in order to establish whether a person was linked to criminal offences/ intelligence and to give feedback to the Member States.

Furthermore, Europol will now explore the possibilities for developing and coordinating investigations into the most interesting cases arising from the operation in order to identify criminal links.

INTERPOL and the EU Commission also played a very important role as couriers were checked in various databases. EU Commission (OLAF) cross checked the persons transporting huge amount of cash or the persons smuggling cash in the OLAF systems such as the Customs Information System (CIS) and FIDE. CIS and FIDE databases were also used by participated Member States'.

INTERPOL will also proceed with a selection of the most significant seizures or declarations from nationals of outside Europe to further investigate with the respective local National Central Bureau and law enforcement authorities any possible links with criminals activities.

The WCO made available the secured CENcomm application as well as hosting the operational coordination unit (OCU).

### **What were the results?**

More than 9 million Euros which were not declared Customs and competent law enforcement agencies were detected. This amount of currency has in some cases given grounds for a number of fines in participating countries. The amount of declarations made during the operational phase amounted to more than 120 million Euros.

During the operation other goods were also seized, amongst these were a seizure of 196 semi-precious stones, seizures of jewelleries etc.

### **Way forward?**

In cooperation with involved parties, Europol will look into the possibility of starting investigations around the most interesting seizures in order to identify links to criminal organizations etc. This time, as in previous JCO ATHENAs this aspect is covered in such a cash operation and final results can first be identified at a much later stage.

### **THANKS**

Thanks to all the participants and international organizations for their strong support and cooperation during this JCPO ATHENA III. Without this strong commitment, this operation would never have become the success it turned out to be.