

REPORT

Operation OPSON II



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1 INTRODUCTION

Operation OPSON stems from the First International Meeting on Counterfeit and Protected Food Products held in Sabaudia (Italy) in April 2010. INTERPOL and the Italian Corpo Forestale dello Stato jointly organised this event. The objective was to set up a global response to the growing phenomenon of counterfeit and substandard food products.

Seizures and investigations show that counterfeit and substandard food is a major concern worldwide. In the European Union alone, for instance, customs administrations seized more than 1 million food products and almost 75,000 items of fake beverages in 2011¹. All kinds of products are counterfeited, from luxury items such as wines or seasonal traditional dishes, to every day food like tea, candy, or condiments. In addition to intellectual property rights infringements, various products are of a substandard quality, meaning that they breach safety and health regulations, dupe consumers and are often unfit for human consumption.

In order to take effective action against the problem, all stakeholders need to be involved, including:

- Law enforcement agencies that provide a repressive response
- Food regulatory agencies that possess the necessary legal expertise
- Private partners who hold intelligence concerning their own products.

Operation OPSON brought these parties together in a week of coordinated action against counterfeit/substandard food and beverages. **Operation OPSON I** was carried out in December 2011 and involved 10 countries plus one observer (The Democratic Republic of Congo). Results were unexpectedly impressive, not only in terms of quantities of seized goods but also in terms of the range of products. In total, **2654.58 tons, 4042 items, 5820 bottles and more than 13 000 litres of food products and beverages were seized or withdrawn from the market.** Products found led to the conclusion that the threat was equally shared among the participants and among the types of products. Luxury items² represented a substantial part of the seizures – 25% of the cases - but so did the more common products such as alcohol (37%), olive oil (3%), and cheese (10%). Regarding the infringements, 38% of the cases breached food safety regulations, while 45% constituted Intellectual Property Right (IPR) infringements. Most of the time, several types of infringements were reported in the same case (food safety, IPR, fiscal, false labelling...).

With regards to these results, and bearing in mind it was only a first attempt, it was therefore necessary to renew the operation. This report presents the results of operation OPSON II carried out in December 2012, with 29 participating countries. Both INTERPOL and EUROPOL coordinated the initiative.

2 SCOPE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Scope

OPSON II kept the same legal scope and framework as Operation OPSON targeting:

- Counterfeit food and beverages
- Substandard food and beverages

Food products are defined³ as any item or substance intended to be, or reasonably expected to be, ingested by humans/animals. Beverages are defined as drinkable liquids, that is to say liquids intended to be, or reasonably expected to be ingested by humans/animals.

This definition does not include live animals (unless being prepared for sale in a market), plants prior to harvesting, medicinal products, cosmetics, tobacco and tobacco products, narcotic or psychotropic substances, or residues and contaminants.

A counterfeit food product is defined as a food product infringing an IPR. All intellectual property rights defined under national and European law are included.

¹ See the report : *Report on EU customs enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights – Results at the EU border 2011* - European Commission Taxation and Customs Union.

² Mainly truffles and caviar.

³ All definitions mentioned here have no legal value but are used in the framework of the operation.

A substandard food product is defined as a product which does not meet the criteria required by European and national law regarding its production, packaging, storage and distribution. Generally speaking, it is a product of a quality inferior to that which is legally required under European and national standards.

2.2 Legal framework

Both European and national legislation concerning intellectual property rights and food safety were enforced during the operation.

The exchange of intelligence and information between INTERPOL and the participating countries was done according to the INTERPOL "Rules on the Processing of Information for the Purposes of International Police Co-operation" (RPI), in Resolution AG-2003-RES-04⁴, and "Implementation Rules for the Rules on the Processing of Information for the Purposes of International Police Co-operation" (IRRPI), in Resolution AG-2007-RES-09⁵.

The exchange of intelligence and information between Europol and the participating countries was carried out according to the Europol Council Decision and all related Decisions concerning the exchange and handling of information⁶.

The exchange of intelligence and information between INTERPOL and Europol was done according to the operational agreement signed on 5 November 2001 between the two organisations.

While no other legal instrument of exchange of information/intelligence and cooperation, international or European (such as the "Naples II convention"⁷) was excluded, no information was exchanged outside of the EUROPOL/INTERPOL legal framework. When relevant, the participating countries exchanged information and cooperated bilaterally. EUROPOL and INTERPOL are therefore not in a position to report on those cases.

3 PARTICIPANTS

3.1 Participating countries, EUROPOL and INTERPOL

The following countries participated in OPSON II (specific services/agencies mentioned below). Unlike in OPSON I, no country participated as an observer. All countries participated in the operation and implemented actions plans.

Countries	Administrations/LEAs
European Member States	
Austria – AT	Federal Police Ministry of Health Regional Food Inspection Agencies

⁴ Rules adopted by the General Assembly at its 72nd session (Benidorm, Spain, 2003) and entered into force on 1 January 2004.

⁵ Rules adopted by the General Assembly at its 76th session (Marrakesh, Morocco, 2007) and entered into force on 1 January 2008.

⁶ COUNCIL DECISION 2009/371/JHA of 6 April 2009 establishing the European Police Office (Europol); COUNCIL DECISION 2009/935/JHA of 30 November 2009 determining the list of third States and organisations with which Europol shall conclude agreements; COUNCIL DECISION 2009/936/JHA of 30 November 2009 adopting the implementing rules for Europol analysis work files; COUNCIL DECISION 2009/934/JHA of 30 November 2009 adopting the implementing rules governing Europol's relations with partners, including the exchange of personal data and classified information; COUNCIL DECISION 2009/968/JHA of 30 November 2009 adopting the rules on the confidentiality of Europol information; and all other related decisions.

⁷ Convention on mutual assistance and cooperation between customs administrations signed in Brussels on 18.12.1997.

Europol Public Information

Belgium - BE	Customs Ministry of Economy, SMEs, Self Employed and Energy Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FASFC)
Bulgaria - BG	Police: Border police, Criminal police Customs Food Safety Agency
Cyprus - CY	Customs
Czech Republic - CZ	Customs
Denmark - DK	Veterinary and Food Administration Customs
France - FR	Central Agency Against Environmental and Public Health Offences (OCLAESP- Police, Gendarmerie) Directorate for Competition, Consumption and Fraud Control (DGCCRF - Ministry of Finance)
Germany - DE ⁸	Bavarian Authority for Food Safety and Health (LGL)
Greece - GR	Economic and Financial Crime Unit (SDOE)
Hungary - HU	National Tax and Customs Authorities (NAV) International Law Enforcement Cooperation Centre (NEBEK)
Iceland - IS	Customs
Italy - IT	Arma dei Carabinieri Guardia di Finanza Corpo Forestale dello Stato
Latvia - LV	Customs
The Netherlands - NL	Customs Food Safety Agency (NVWA)
Portugal - PT	Customs Food Safety Agency (ASAE)
Romania - RO	Police
Slovak Republic - SK	Customs
Spain - ES	Guardia civil (Unidades de policía judicial, Servicio de protección de la naturaleza, costas y fronteras, Unidades de seguridad ciudadana) Regional Food Safety Agencies (Consejerías de Sanidad y de Alimentación de las Comunidades Autónomas) Customs
Sweden - SE	Customs National Food Agency

⁸ Only the Länd of Bavaria took part in OPSON II.

Europol Public Information

United Kingdom – UK	UK Border Agency (UKBA) Food Standards Agency (FSA) HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Trading Standards Authorities (TSA) Intellectual Property Office (IPO)
Third countries – Operational agreement with Europol	
Colombia – CO	Police (Policía Nacional)
United States of America - USA	IPR Centre Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI)
Third countries – Exchange of information via INTERPOL (no operational agreement with Europol)	
Benin – BJ	Customs
Ivory Coast – CI	Police Customs Food Regulatory Authority (ANSSA)
Jordan – JO	Food Regulatory Authority
Nigeria – NG	Police
Thailand – TH	Police Customs Food Regulatory Authority
Turkey – TK	Police Customs Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs Ministry of Finance
South Africa – ZA	Police

The participating countries had to designate a national contact point responsible for the operation. The countries could appoint a single point of contact at the national level, or one point of contact per agency/administration.

EUROPOL and INTERPOL coordinated the operation by providing expertise and intelligence as well as technical and logistical support.

3.2 Private partners

The following private companies/associations participated in operation OPSON through:

- providing intelligence and risk assessment on their products during the pre operational phase;
- providing expertise in legal proceedings when needed during the week of action.

Name and type	Types of products
CIVC Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne (Association of Champagne producers) – producers association	Sparkling Wine, protected by a geographical indication

Colgate-Palmolive Company – firm	Healthcare products, especially dental care, trademarks protected ⁹
Consorzio di tutela Gorgonzola DOP – producers association	Cheese, protected by a geographical indication
Consorzio di tutela Prosecco DOP – producers association	Sparkling wine, protected by a geographical indication
Unaprol Consorzio Olivicolo Italiano – producers association	Olive oil, especially extra virgin olive oil
Ferrero Spa – firm	Mainly confectionery, trademarks protected
IFSP International Federation of Spirits Producers – producers association	Spirits and liquors, trademarks protected
Moët Hennessy – firm	Champagnes, wines and spirits, trademarks and geographical indication protected
Nestlé – firm	Mainly confectionery, trademarks protected
REACT – Association of right holders	Non profit organisation defending the interests of more than 190 right holders, among them companies of the food industry

Each firm transmitted a list of relevant contact points according to the concerned geographical area.

Private partners were asked to join on the grounds of:

- Their size and presence in the different markets (Europe, USA, Middle East, Africa...), prioritising those most affected by the threat of counterfeiting.
- Their products. Companies producing commonly counterfeited products and/or highly regulated products (dairy products, fishery etc...) were contacted.

The involvement of the above-mentioned private partners does not constitute any preferred relationship with EUROPOL or INTERPOL. Their involvement was made on a voluntary basis, and did not imply any specific action from the law enforcement agencies involved. EUROPOL and INTERPOL are willing to develop partnerships with private partners of the food industry in order to reinforce the cooperation and the exchange of operational information. The participating countries can suggest any company/association for EUROPOL and INTERPOL to contact, when they are present at the European and/or international level.

In the course of the actions undertaken during the operational phase, new partnerships were established. As an example, in France, the OCLAESP cooperated with the Tequila Regulatory Council, an inter-professional organisation defending the Mexican liquor. Consequently, the TRC has expressed its willingness to join the next phase of the operation (operation OPSON III).

4 SCHEDULE OF THE OPERATION

The timing of the operation was scheduled on the basis of Central European Time (CET). The operation was divided into 3 phases.

4.1 Preparatory phase

Operation OPSON II was launched in March 2012, immediately after the debriefing meeting on OPSON I held at INTERPOL Headquarters. The operation was presented to the potential new participating countries. A second briefing meeting took place in September 2012 at EUROPOL Headquarters. The meeting gathered all the participating private partners and established the final details of the week of action. This pre-operational phase consisted of gathering intelligence on the phenomenon, initiating collaboration with private partners and establishing an operational plan. Each participating country elaborated its own internal profiling and action plans.

⁹ Seized products infringing the rights of the Colgate Palmolive Company were considered as side seizures, as they were neither food nor beverages.

This year, the emphasis was given to the cooperation with the private sector. During the second operational meeting, the right holders had the opportunity to present and display their products. The national contact points could circulate freely in the room and get in touch with the most threatened firms according to their geographical areas or particular situations.



Workshop on extra virgin olive oil – Brussels 27/11/2012

At the end of November 2012, shortly before the operational phase, Unaprol, the Italian association of olive oil producers, organised a workshop in order to assist in identifying genuine products. The event spanned one day and took place in Brussels. It raised the awareness of the phenomenon of olive oil fraudulently labelled as “extra-virgin”. Explanations were given by experts on the manufacturing processes which should be respected, on the different fraud techniques and on regulations surrounding the product.

4.2 Operational phase

The operation phase spanned one week, from Monday 03 December 2012 until Sunday 09 December 2012 included. Checks and investigations were carried out on high risk entities in the food and beverages supply chain. Each participating country independently decided the type of controls to be carried out. INTERPOL and EUROPOL performed crosschecks against their databases and coordinated the dissemination of intelligence in order to support ongoing actions. The operational centre was activated at EUROPOL’s Headquarters. EUROPOL liaison officers from the participating countries as well as the EUROPOL liaison officers permanently seconded at INTERPOL were actively involved. So were the National Contact Bureaus (INTERPOL NCB) from the seven participating third countries exchanging information via INTERPOL.

4.3 Post operational phase

From December 2012 to May 2013, the participating states gathered and sent the results of the operational phase to EUROPOL and INTERPOL. Both organisations analysed the data, to assess the threat, identify best practices and areas of improvement. A debriefing meeting was held in May 2013, during the Second International Meeting on Combating Food Related Crime organised by the Italian Corpo Forestale dello Stato. The present report was released and discussed during this event. Exchange of operational information on the cross border investigations initiated continued for as long as necessary.

5 RESULTS OF THE OPERATIONAL PHASE

5.1 Received results

Results of the operation were to be sent in a formatted way, using the data collection template approved in the course of the pre operational phase (second preparatory meeting – September 2012).

Results received were sometimes not detailed enough to be analysed. Therefore, it was once again not possible to provide an in-depth analysis of the results this year, especially regarding the type and origin of the seized goods. Furthermore, given the high number of participating countries and all the enforcement actions carried out, results presented here are not exhaustive. Please refer to section 7 for comments on this situation.

5.2 Seizures, checks and investigations

All participating countries carried out checks throughout their national territory.

The Spanish National contact point reported that more than 8000 agents from the Guardia Civil were involved in operation OPSON. 2223 infringements were discovered, among them 1367 administrative infringements. Law enforcement authorities arrested 103 persons, identified 713 vehicles and reported 5 misdemeanours. In the Slovak Republic, 1464 checks were carried out and led to the notification of 31 infringements. Bulgaria performed 432 inspections, across all participating agencies, and verified 9000 tons of food. Romania undertook 164 controls, discovered 38 crimes and imposed 85 fines amounting to 47000 EUR. Belgium carried out 91 checks, among them 29 retail store inspections.

Europol Public Information

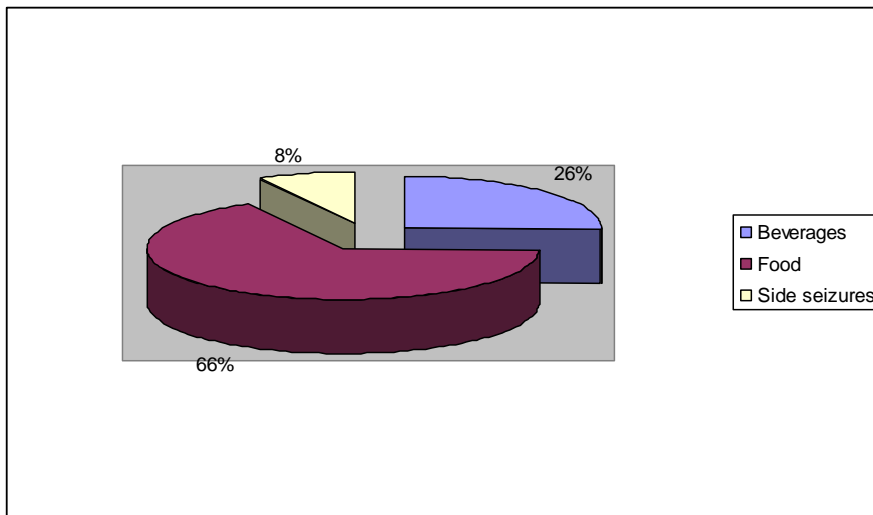
A check is considered positive when a legal proceeding of any kind is initiated.

In total, 164 cases leading to the seizure and/or withdrawal of products were reported (84 cases in OPSON I). Statistics presented below are based on those reported cases.

- **The seized quantities** are as follows:

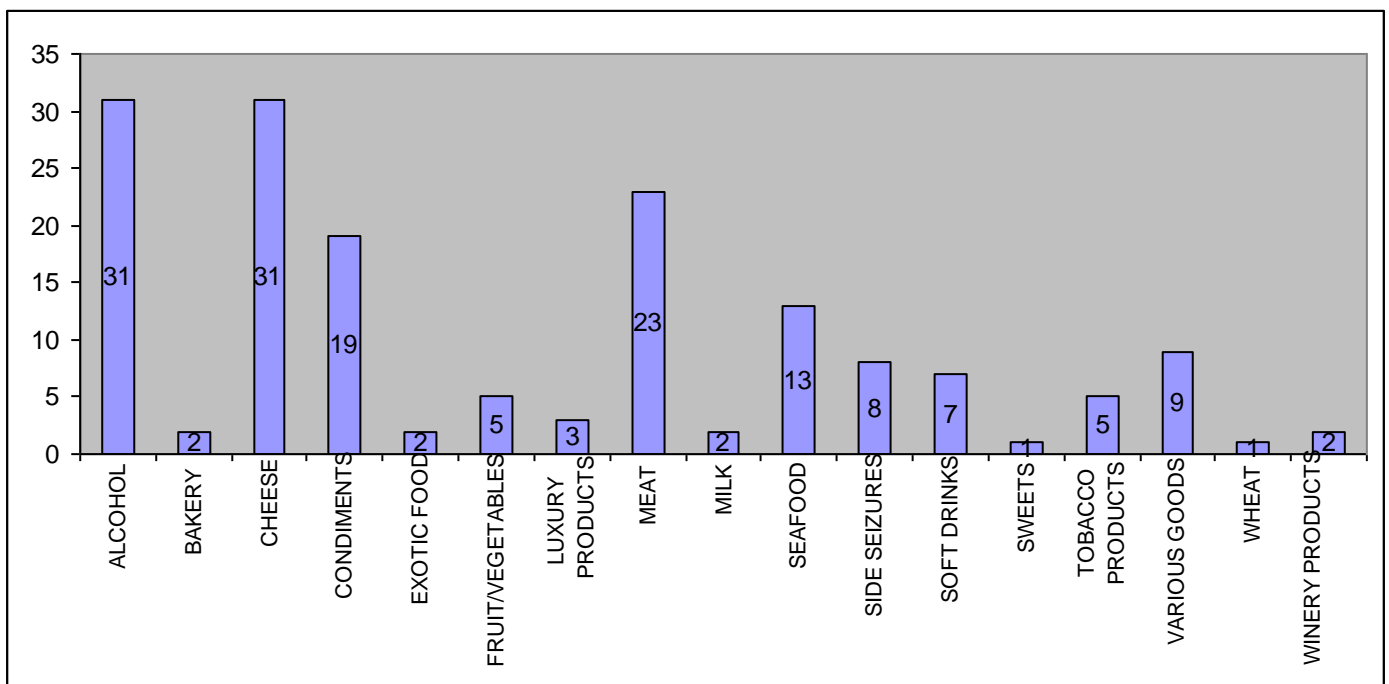
Units of measurement	Quantities
Tons	262,86
Litres	35 702,48
Pieces	2 310 131
Bottles	394 763

- The proportion of cases by either **food or beverages** is as follows:



Types of seized products by number of cases

- The proportion of cases by type of product is as follows:

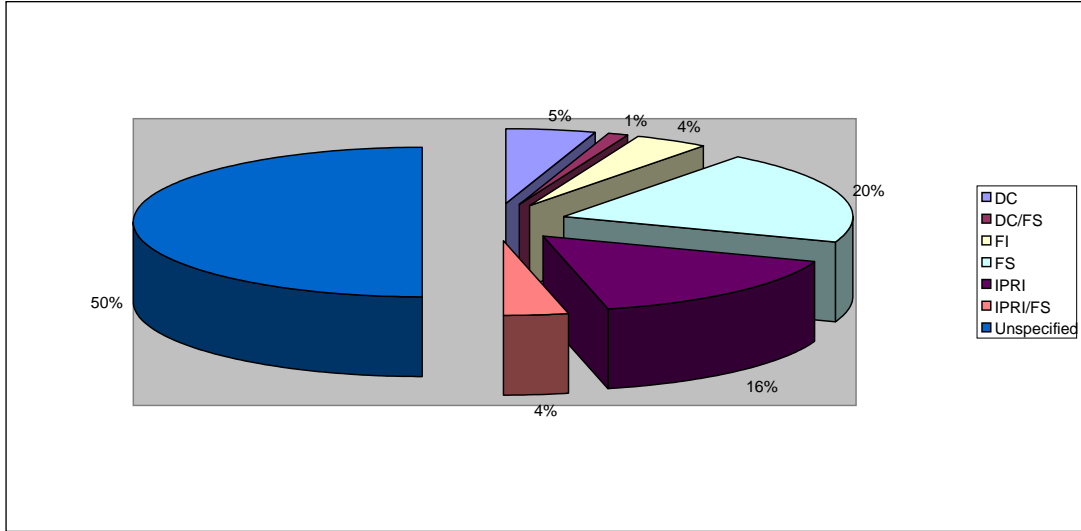


Types of seized products by number of cases

Due to the lack of information, no analysis can be performed on the origin of the goods. This field was

left incomplete in the data collection template.

- The types of infringements were as follows:



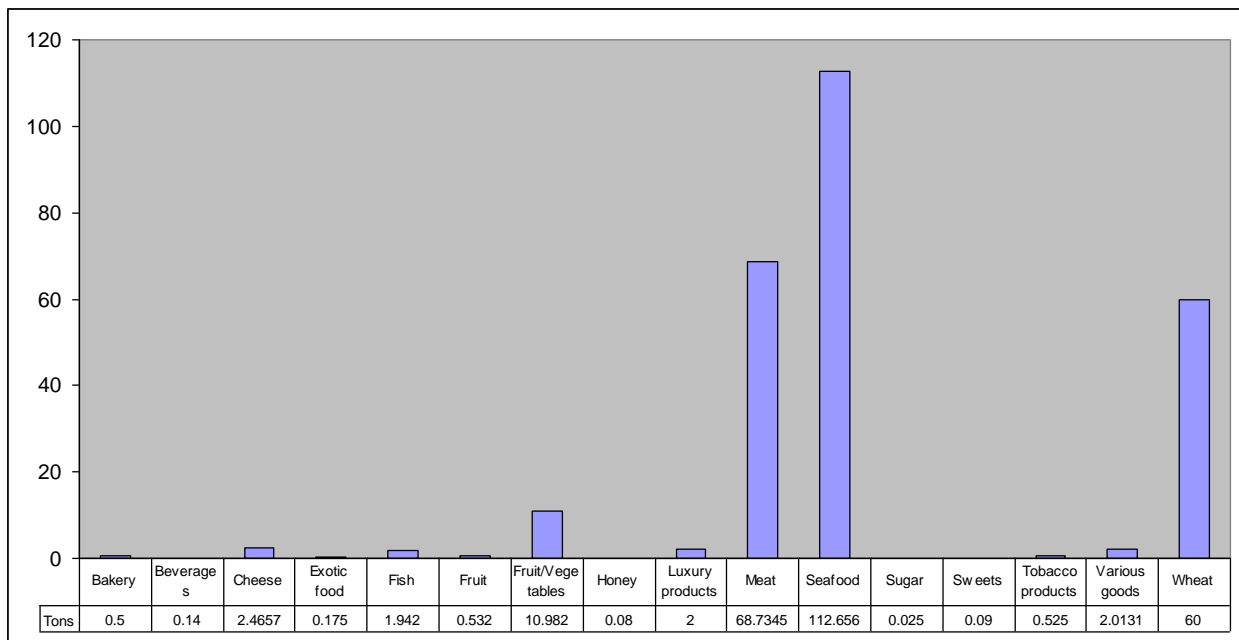
Types of infringements by number of cases

DC	Deception of Consumers
FI	Fiscal Infringement
FS	Infringement of a Food Safety regulation
IPRI	Infringement of an Intellectual Property Right

The majority of the reported cases where the infringement is specified represented breaches of food/health regulation (20%). Unfortunately, the infringement was not reported in 50% of the cases, thus making it difficult to draw any conclusion on the most frequently encountered offences.

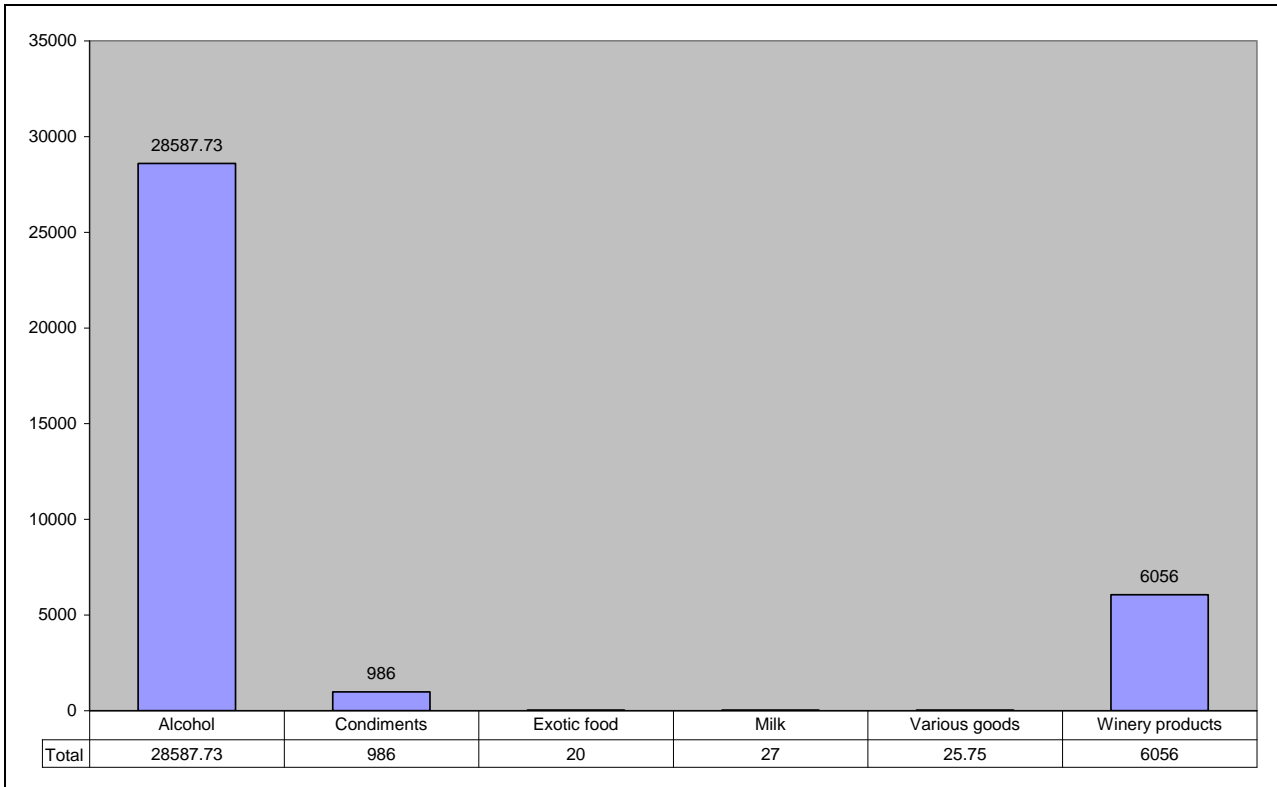
- Regarding the type of products seized**, the proportion is as follows:

For the products counted in tons, seafood (112,65 tons seized) and meat (68 tons seized) are the most affected products. The infringements are mostly related to food safety and false labelling in order to deceive the consumer (i.e 89% of the seized seafood).



Products seized in tons

For the products counted in Litres, the distribution is as follows:

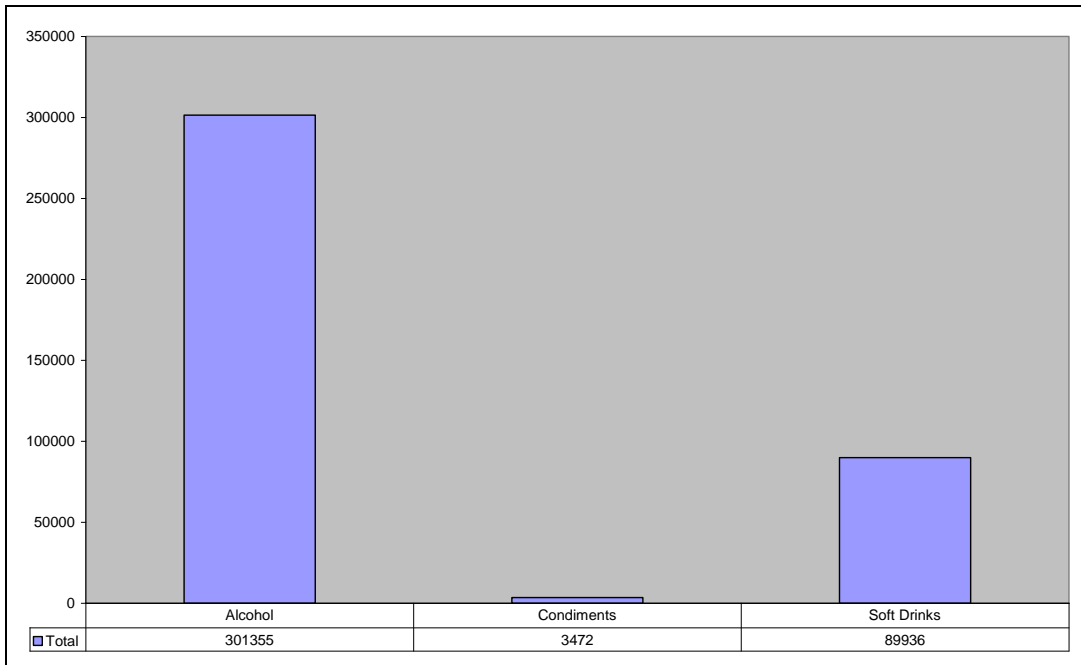


Products seized in Litres

Under the category *Condiments* are counted the seizures of olive oil, that is to say 785 litres in total, mostly in Italy (50% of the cases).

The most seized product clearly remains alcohol, representing 80% of the items withdrawn or seized.

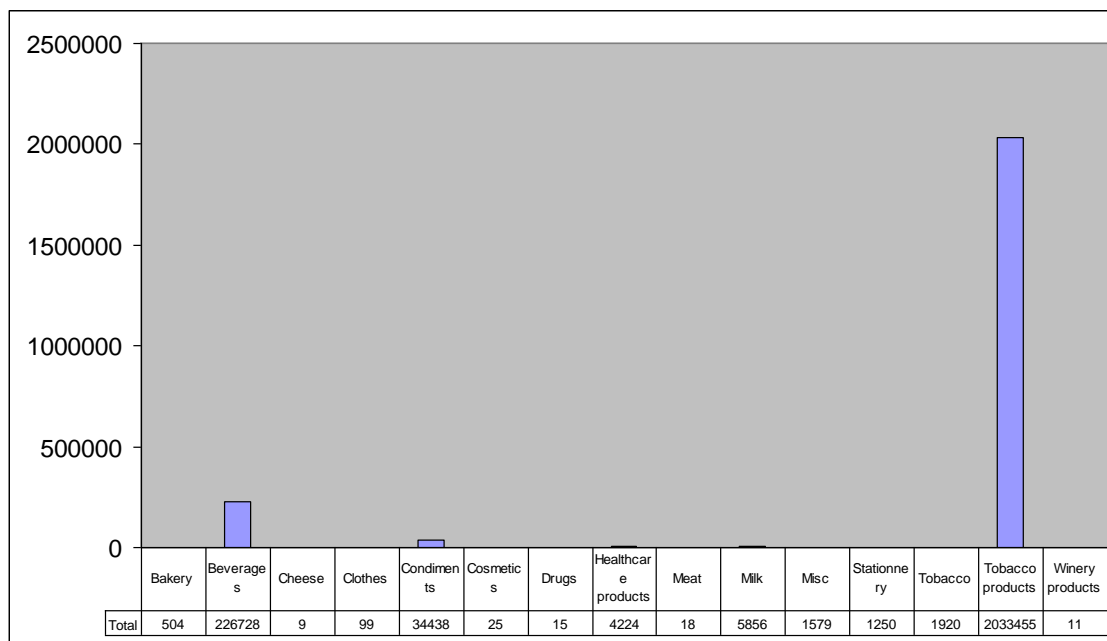
Items were also counted in bottles and pieces. Below is the distribution according to those products:



Products seized in bottles

Among the soft drinks, of note is the seizure of 9 336 bottles of orange juice in Thailand, not complying with national food safety regulations.

Products counted in pieces are mostly side seizures (see below). The category *Meat* mostly consists of pieces of ham seized in Italy. The milk refers to condensed milk packaged in tins seized in the Ivory Coast.



Products seized in pieces

More detailed statistics are available in Annex 1.

- **No major threat to public health** was reported regarding the seized products. OPSON II raised the awareness of the authorities on specific products. In The Netherlands, as a consequence of the operation, the Food Safety Agency (NVWA) initiated an inspection on the main importer of the organic compound Methyhexanamine, commonly known as DMAA and used as a doping substance. Moreover, recent cases although outside of the framework of OPSON II proved the impact of counterfeit/substandard products on health can be lethal. As an example, the case of counterfeit alcohol in the Czech Republic which killed 38 persons is not listed in the results but was actively discussed during the second preparatory meeting of OPSON II.
- **In total, 9 cross-border investigations** and/or cases have been initiated, compared with four during OPSON I. Three of them consisted in the transmission of intelligence leading to seizures. One investigation is led by Sweden and concerns a company selling falsely labelled fish roe. Iceland launched an investigation on the illicit trafficking of Vodka. The main suspect is adversely known by the Icelandic police. The investigation is still ongoing. Finally, of note is that one investigation stems from seizures made during OPSON I (counterfeit condiments).
- **Several side seizures** were made during the week of action. They resulted from the checks carried out within the framework of OPSON but did not concern food or beverages. They involved goods infringing intellectual property rights. As specified in the operational plan, the side seizures are part of the results of OPSON. They are detailed in the table below.

SIDE SEIZURES OPSON II				
COUNTRY	PRODUCT	PRODUCT DETAILED	PIECES	INFRINGEMENT
IVORY COAST	HEALTHCARE PRODUCTS	TOOTHPASTE	1165	//
IVORY COAST	HEALTHCARE PRODUCTS	TOOTHBRUSH	1912	//
IVORY COAST	CLOTHES	PAGNE	99	//
ROMANIA	STATIONNERY	SUPERGLUE	1250	//
ROMANIA	HEALTHCARE PRODUCTS	TOOTHPASTE	257	//

THAILAND	COSMECTICS	MISC.	25	FS
THAILAND	DRUGS	//	15	FS
TURKEY	TOBACCO PRODUCTS	CIGARETTE PAPER	2000000	FI
TURKEY	TOBACCO PRODUCTS	CIGARETTE	33455	FI

5.3 EUROPOL’s Mobile office deployment



*Mobile office deployment Spain
Guardia Civil – December 2012*

During the week of action, EUROPOL deployed its mobile office in Spain, to assist the SEPRONA unit¹⁰ from Madrid on a case of counterfeit caviar. On-the-spot deployment was carried out on 04/12/2012. EUROPOL and INTERPOL supported house searches of the premises of a company allegedly importing caviar from Iran. These falsely labelled products were packaged in unhygienic conditions, originated from China and were sold in famous legitimate retail stores. Goods found on the spot were seized and assets were confiscated.



Findings of the house search – Cash money

EUROPOL also deployed the mobile office in Hungary, to assist the Hungarian customs during checks on the road, and various premises.



Mobile office deployment Hungary - Hungarian Customs – December 2012

¹⁰ The SEPRONA (Servicio de Protección de la Naturaleza) units are specialised units protecting the environment. They belong to the Guardia Civil.

5.4 Highlights

The following paragraph highlights some significant results/facts. More detailed country reports are attached as annexes.

CO: Police in cooperation with the Regional Health services discovered an illegal slaughterhouse and seized 400 kg of meat unfit for human consumption.



Illegal slaughterhouse – Colombia – December 2012

FR: police seized beer bottles derived from hemp and labelled as such, thus promoting the use of drugs, a misdemeanour in the French penal law.

IT: in total, the Italian authorities seized 1,41 tons of cheese. Most of the infringements related to misuse of geographical indications.

SK: deployed around 50 customs agents every day and the same number of staff from the food safety services to run checks in the operational phase.

ES: publicised the checks carried out and the results with videos posted online (<http://www.youtube.com/user/guardiacivil> – channel Guardia Civil)

TH: The Royal Thai Police seized machinery and equipment to manufacture labels and packaging of counterfeit soya sauce (34 403 counterfeit labels were seized as well).

FR: cooperated with China on a case of counterfeit wine. Based on the intelligence transmitted by the French, Chinese customs seized the goods in the harbour of Beijing.¹¹



Press conference in Thailand – December 2012

¹¹ No information was given on the quantity seized. Therefore, the seizure could not be taken into account in the results.

6 EVALUATION

In the wake of what has been previously explained, and referring to the objectives defined in the operational plan, the following evaluation can be made:

❖ On a strategic level:

Objective	Achievement	Measures of improvement
Improve practical cooperation between all national law enforcement agencies, food and/or drugs agencies, private companies, INTERPOL, Europol and all other organisations involved in the operation.	Complete	
Enhance enforcement capabilities of law enforcement agencies regarding counterfeit food products, by raising the awareness of the threat and regulations linked to these types of products	Complete	
Prevent trafficking in counterfeit food and beverages	Partial	Enhance follow up of the investigations Obtain more intelligence on supply chains
Deliver tangible results in terms of seizures	Complete	
Develop relevant follow up actions with law enforcement agencies involved	Partial	Idem

❖ On a tactical level

Objective	Achievement	Measures of improvement Suggestions
Gather intelligence on the modus operandi of traders of counterfeit food products and beverages, or other goods if found	Partial	Receive structured data on seized goods, useable for statistical purposes.
Enhance/create risk profiles on these activities	Partial	Idem
Identify organised criminal groups involved in this trafficking.	None	Enhance cross border cooperation and the follow up of investigations

❖ On an operational level:

Objective	Achievement	Measures of improvement Suggestions
Seize counterfeit and substandard food/beverages	Complete	
Conduct investigations on the illegal trade of counterfeit and substandard food/beverages	Complete	
Raise consumer awareness and awareness of national administrations and law enforcement agencies on the phenomenon	Complete	
Enhance cooperation between law enforcement agencies and other competent agencies without enforcement powers	Complete	
Enhance the exchange of information between participating countries, INTERPOL and Europol	Partial	Increase use of the operational centre to exchange live data on ongoing cases

7 CONCLUSION

In terms of the products seized, the results of operation OPSON II prove that the threat posed by counterfeit and substandard food/beverages in the EU and the rest of the world is real. The cross borders investigations illustrate that this illicit traffic develops on a European and/or international scale. Operational results and recent cases on mislabelled food such as horsemeat, eggs, rat meat, underline the complexity of those investigations, where convoluted supply chains entailing the dilution of responsibilities have to be brought to light. The general assessment of OPSON is above satisfactory, bearing in mind that OPSON is the first operation of its kind, and only in its second phase. This year once again, operation OPSON demonstrated the need for its continuation.

8 ANNEXES

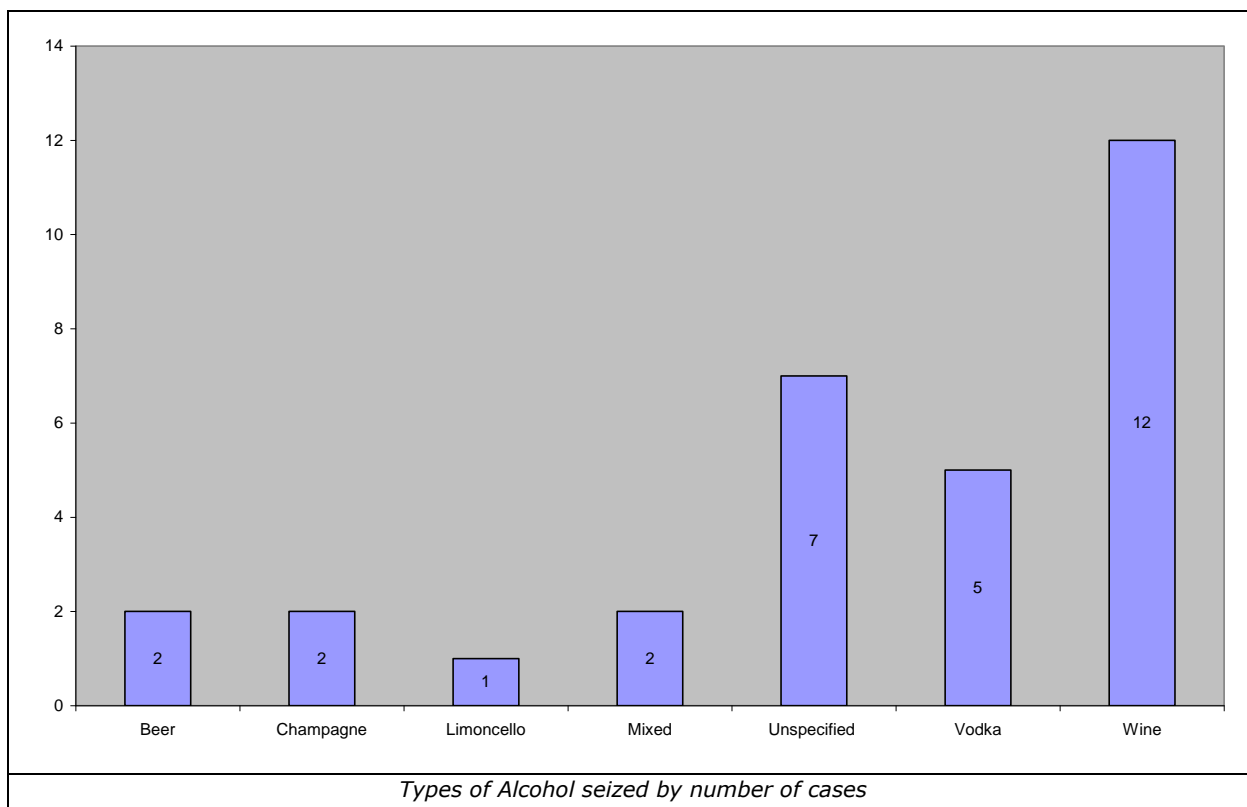
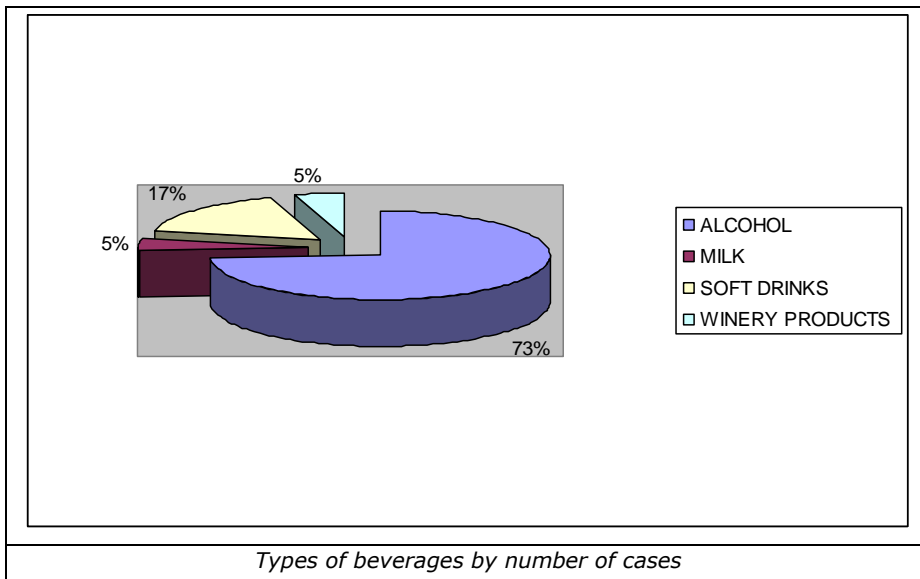
Annex 1: Detailed statistics

Annex 2: INTERPOL/EUROPOL Press release

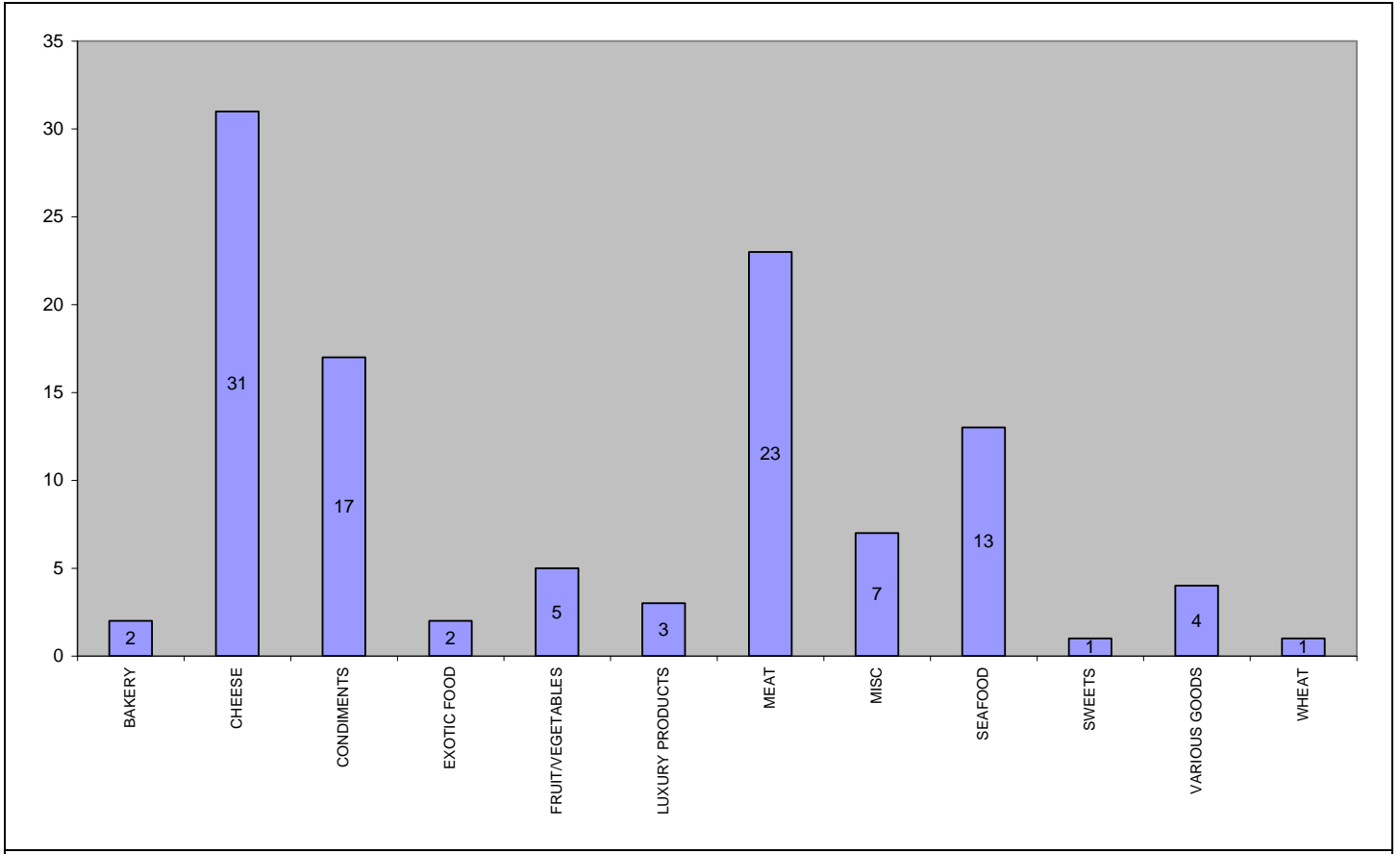
Annexe 1: Detailed statistics

Statistics built on the 164 reported cases mentioned above (p10)

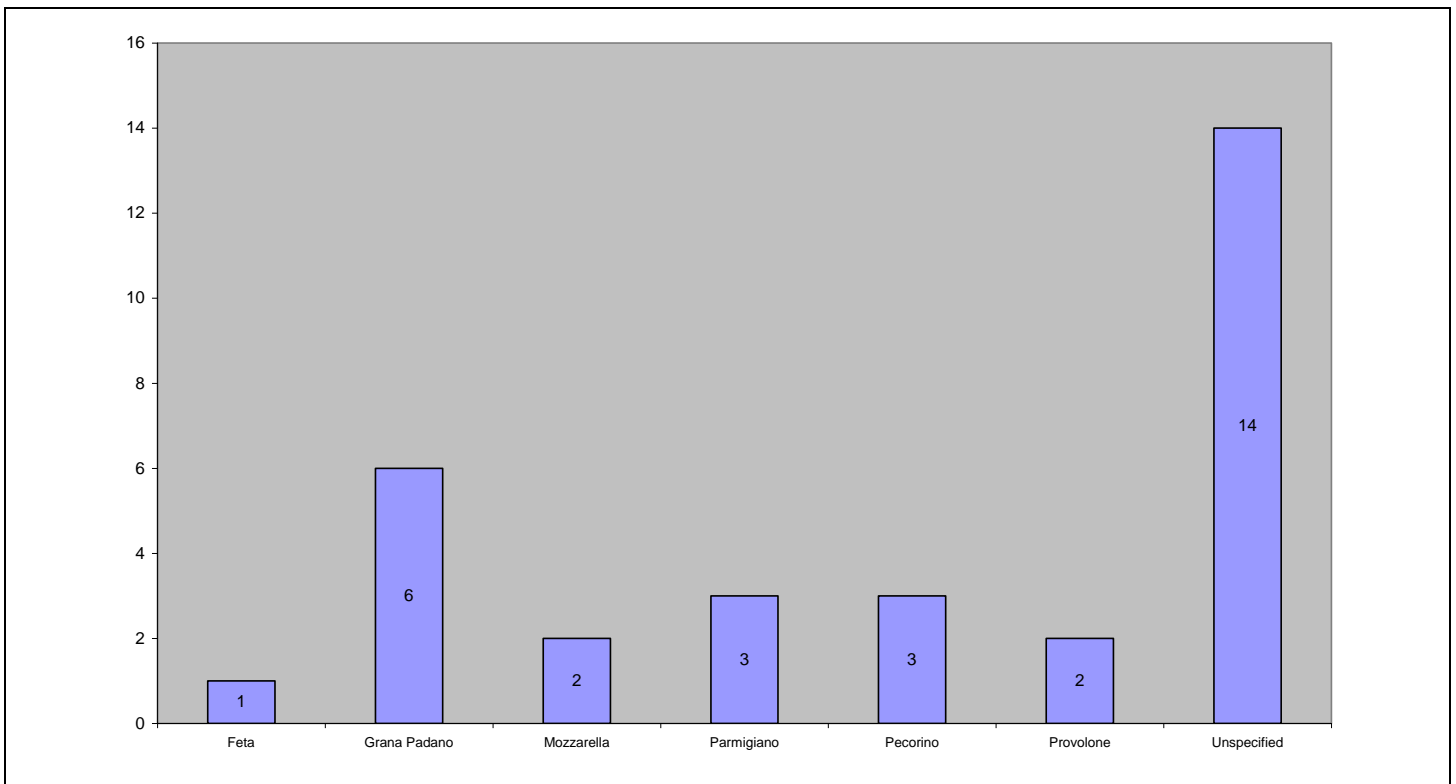
- Seized Beverages



- Seized Food



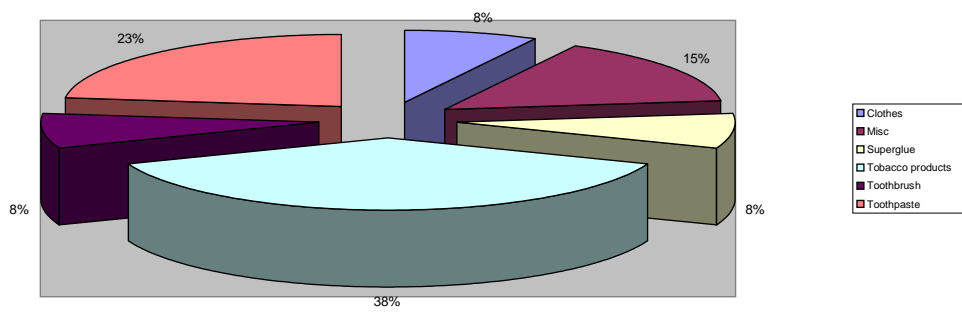
Types of food products seized by number of cases



Types of cheese seized by number of cases

Out of the 11 seizures of oil, olive oil was seized in 5 cases, and other types of oil were seized in 6 cases. 20,532 tons of ham were seized, mostly on grounds of IPRI. Luxury products encompassed caviar and truffles and amounted to 2 tons. 90kg of sweets were seized in Romania.

- Side seizures



Types of non food products seized by number of cases

Annexe 2: INTERPOL/EUROPOL Joint press release

INTERPOL-Europol operation results in global seizures of fake and illicit food

14 December 2012

A joint INTERPOL-Europol operation targeting fake and substandard food and drink, as well as the organised crime networks behind this illicit trade, has resulted in the seizure of more than 135 tonnes of potentially harmful goods ranging from every day products of coffee, soup cubes and olive oil, to luxury goods such as truffles and caviar. A further 100 tonnes of misdeclared and/or potentially hazardous food was confiscated during investigations linked to Operation Opson II. Operation Opson II (3 - 9 December), which involved 29 countries from all regions of the world, resulted in the recovery of more than 385,000 litres of counterfeit liquids including vodka, wine, soy sauce and orange juice, in addition

to fish, seafood and meat declared unfit for human consumption, as well as fake candy bars and condiments.

Fake and substandard food and drink are often produced, transported and stored without any form of regulation or hygiene controls, so consumers buying these illicit goods are risking their health and safety and the criminal networks make millions in profits which can be used to fund other illegal activities such as human and drug trafficking.

Operation Opson II saw the number of participating countries rise from 10 in 2011 to nearly 30 this year, an increase which, says Simone Di Meo, a Criminal Intelligence Officer with INTERPOL's Trafficking in Illicit Goods unit, reflects a growing awareness of the problem and the organised crime involvement. "With this year's operation going beyond Europe and involving countries in Africa, the Americas and Asia, this will enable us to gather even more intelligence about the networks behind this criminal activity and potentially identify global links with other types of crime," says Mr Di Meo.

1

Coordinated by INTERPOL and Europol, the week-long operation was supported by customs, police and national food regulatory bodies in addition to partners from the private sector. Checks and raids were carried out at airports, seaports, shops, markets and private homes. "With this operation we are showing the criminal networks involved in this line of business that they are not safe and, just as important, we are helping to protect public health and safety. In many cases, the quality of the packaging of the fake food and drink is so well done that consumers may not even be aware that they are buying illicit products and potentially risking their lives," says Chris Vansteenkiste, Project Manager of the Intellectual Property Crime Team at Europol.

Among the key aims of Operation Opson II (meaning food in ancient Greek) were to develop practical cooperation between national law enforcement, food and drug agencies and private companies; identify the organised criminal groups behind the trafficking and raise the awareness of consumers and governments about this type of crime.

Countries which took part in this operation are Austria, Belgium, Benin, Bulgaria, Colombia, Czech Republic, Cyprus,

Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Latvia, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom and the USA. Investigations are continuing in many countries and for additional information on national activities, please contact the enforcement agencies of the countries concerned.

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