



RILO

Eastern and Central Europe

World Customs Organization



HERALD ISSUE
3/2024

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Warsaw 2024

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Editorial

Dear Readers,

RILO ECE is pleased to present the latest issue of the Herald quarterly.

This edition is particularly significant for us as it contains reports from the 27th Administrative Meeting for National Contact Points of RILO Eastern and Central Europe, which took place thanks to the kindness and excellent cooperation with the Customs Service of the Republic of Moldova. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss regional issues, making the participation of NCPs and other RILOs particularly important. Such a meeting could not have taken place without the involvement of a representative from the WCO Secretariat, who plays a crucial role from the perspective of the Global RILO Network and the IT tools used. The meeting was also an excellent and unique opportunity to engage with representatives from other agencies, as well as the private sector.

We would like to sincerely thank all the speakers and everyone involved who contributed to the success of the meeting!

This issue is also special for another reason: there have been changes in the NCP positions in North

Macedonia and Türkiye. We warmly welcome the new NCP from North Macedonia, Mr. Semir MUSA, and the new NCP from Türkiye, Mr. Sinan SÖZCÜ, and look forward to a fruitful collaboration. We wish them success and satisfaction in working with us!

As usual, this issue largely reflects the contributions from our countries in the Region. We would like to draw your attention to articles prepared by the NCPs from Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, Türkiye, Montenegro, and Poland.

An especially interesting article focuses on the CONNECTOR Project – we encourage you to explore this topic and thank the authors for their excellent cooperation in preparing this material.

We would also like to highlight the closer collaboration between RILO ECE and WCO's Capacity Building Directorate, which resulted in the participation in the WCO A-CIP Programme roundtable for Ukraine's State Customs Service.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue, and if you have any suggestions regarding the content, please feel free to contact our team at riloece@mf.gov.pl.

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RILO ECE team



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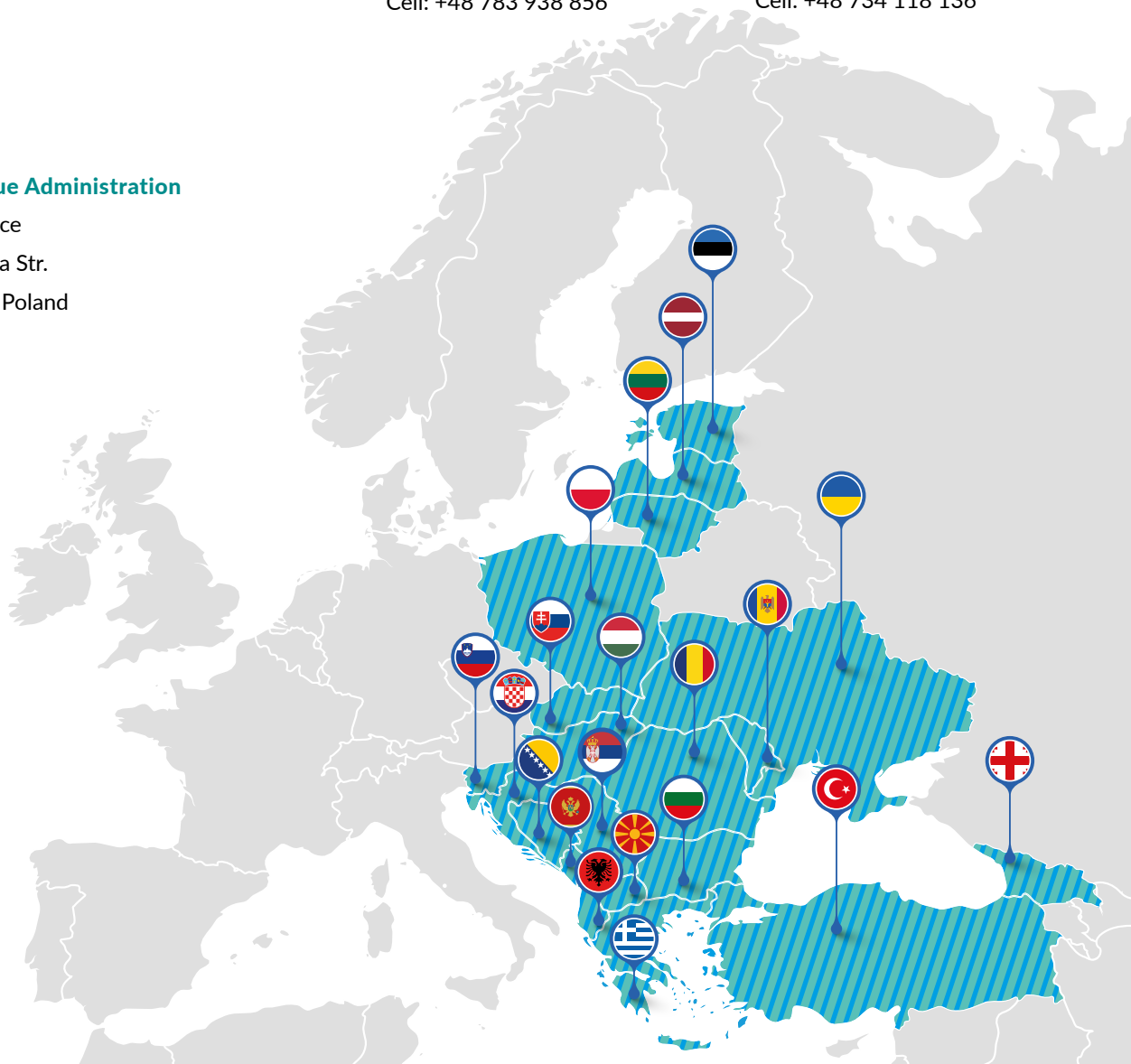


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National Revenue Administration

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Our people



Dear NCPs of RILO ECE,

Dear Colleagues,

I am Semir MUSA, Head of Intelligence Department, Custom administration of Republic of North Macedonia. I have been assigned as the new national contact point person for RILO ECE.

I graduated from Gymnasium Kiril and Metodij, Tetovo. I continued my studies at the faculty of business administration, in South East European University.

After graduation, I started working in Customs Administration as Senior Inspector with mobile scanner, Department for Control and Investigation. After 4 years experience I continues working in another department – Department for Customs System, as Senior Adviser for nontariff measures and Intelcrual Property Rights, for 11 years. One yaer I was appointed as Asistent Director in the Sector of administrative and technicall affairs.

As the North Macedonian's National Contact Point, we attach great importance to our collaboration with RILO ECE which we have close ties, and want to continue this effectively together.

Semir Musa
NCP North Macedonia



Dear NCPs of RILO ECE,

Dear Colleagues,

I am Sinan SÖZCÜ, an assistant trade expert at the Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Türkiye, Directorate General of Customs Enforcement. I have been assigned as the new national contact point person for RILO ECE.

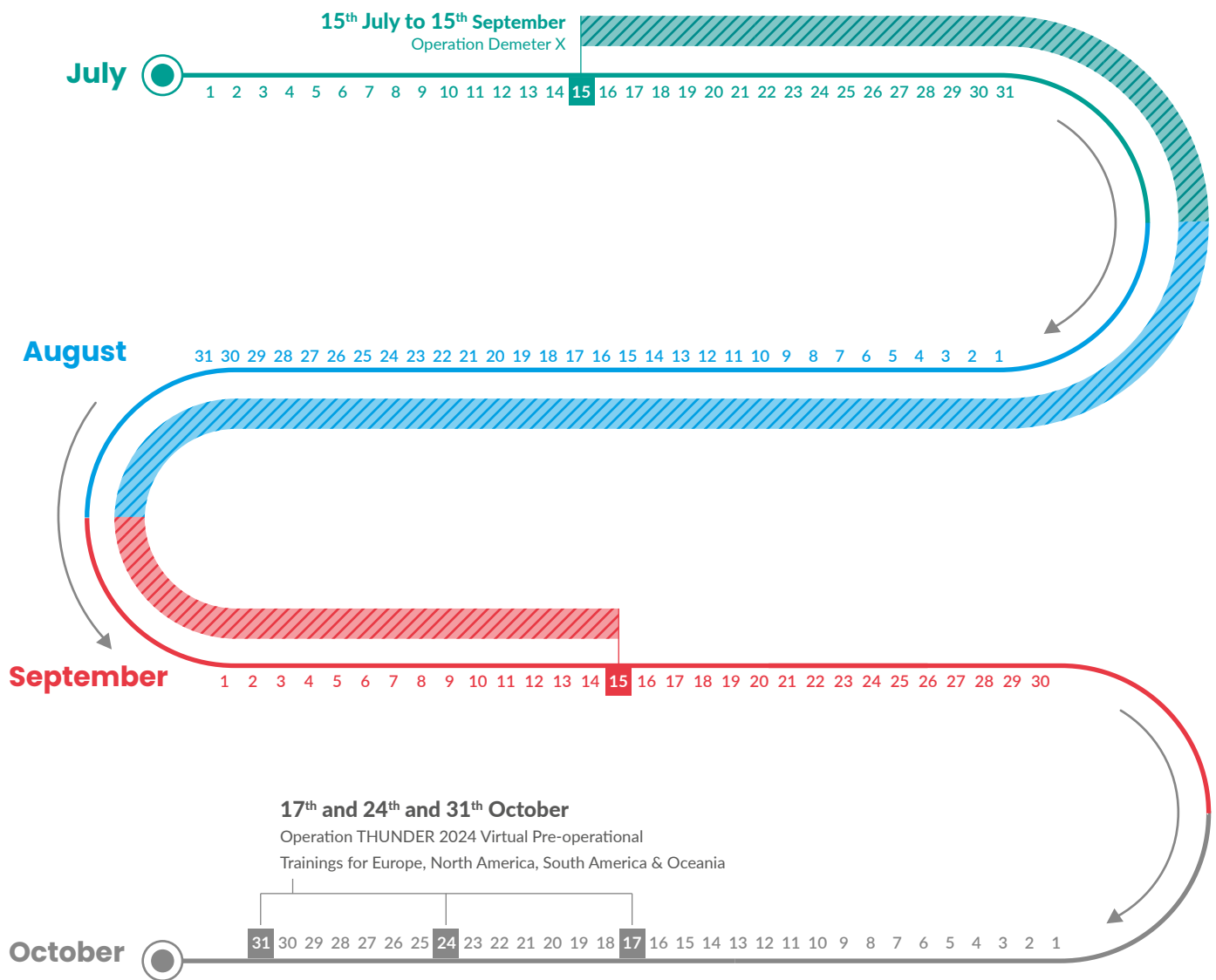
I graduated from Ege University, department of international relations. During this period, I had a chance to be an Erasmus+ student at War Studies University/Akademia Sztuki Wojennej in Warsaw. I continued my studies at the faculty of security science. When I returned to Türkiye, I did an internship at Izmir Development Agency which is an regional public institution before graduating from university.

After graduation, I was appointed to Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen Airport as customs enforcement officer which was my first title in my career. During my duty, I was assigned to judicial law enforcement duties within scope of fighting against smuggling/illegal trade and drug trafficking. After I started as an assistant trade expert at the Directorate General of Customs Enforcement, I continued to work in the same fields. I work for Turkish Customs Enforcement since December, 2021.

As the Türkiye's National Contact Point, we attach great importance to our collaboration with RILO ECE which we have close ties, and want to continue this effectively together.

Sinan SÖZCÜ
NCP Türkiye

Timeline 3Q 2024





Articles

27th Administrative Meeting for National Contact Points of RILO Eastern and Central Europe

- On October 16-17, 2023, the 27th Administrative Meeting for National Contact Points (NCPs) of RILO ECE was held in Chisinau, Moldova.
- The meeting was organized by the RILO ECE team in close collaboration with the NCP Moldova, Ms. Carolina Chiruta.
- Delegates from countries in the region attended the event, including Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, Estonia, Greece, Georgia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, as well as representatives from RILO Eastern and Southern Africa, RILO Asia/Pacific, RILO Western Europe, the WCO Secretariat, the EU High-Level Advisers' Mission, SELEC, EUBAM, EUPM Moldova, FRONTEX, and private sector representatives from the UPU, JTI, and PMI.



Mr. Alexandru IACUB – Director of the Customs Service of the Republic of Moldova

The Director of the Customs Service of the Republic of Moldova, Mr. Alexandru Iacub, mentioned during the forum that this event is undoubtedly a valuable opportunity to strengthen administrative cooperation between customs authorities and other key institutions. The work of RILO ECE is an important tool contributing to border protection and preventing criminal activities that may threaten national and international security.

During the two-day discussions, particular attention was given to new IT solutions that facilitate real-time information exchange, CEN data visualization tool, and the development of digital solutions for customs authorities to collect, analyze, and manage data in the fight against fraud.



Ms. Ana LUCA – Deputy General Secretary
Ms. Lidia ABABII – Deputy Director of the Customs Service of the Republic of Moldova
Mr. Radu RADU – Deputy Director of the Customs Service of the Republic of Moldova

The meeting's agenda covered several current issues, including a review of the main achievements of the current year, as well as the setting of future cooperation priorities.

All participants emphasized the importance of mutual administrative cooperation in the customs field, both at the regional and international levels.



NCP Croatia



European Union High Level Adviser on Customs and Tax Policy



Head of RILO ECE



NCP Moldova



NCP Poland



nCEN Project Leader



Global RILO Network Coordinator at the WCO Secretariat



NCP Albania



UPU



JTI

Articles



RILO ECE Senior Specialist



RILO A/P



RILO WE



RILO ESA



FRONTEX



EUPM



EUBAM

The NCP Romania, Mr. Adrian Videanu, announced that the 28th Administrative Meeting for National Contact Points of RILO ECE will be organized by the Romanian Customs Authority (RCA) in 2025.

The RILO ECE team is very pleased with Romania's proposal and is already starting to prepare and work on the arrangements for next year.

However, in light of the exemplary organization of the meeting in Moldova, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Customs Service of the Republic of Moldova for their excellent organization, and especially to Ms. Carolina Chiruta.

We already encourage participation in the next meeting, and in the meantime, we look forward to fruitful cooperation with all partners both domestically and abroad!

[Watch the recap of the meeting!](#)

Romania: Cocaine in the barrels of fruit pulp

By Adrian Videanu – NCP Romania

Romanian Customs Authority, Office for Customs Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (CCU for Naples II Convention)

Record cocaine seizure in Romania found in 16 tons of fruit destined for the Netherlands.

On September 18, 2024, as part of an import operation from Ecuador, carried out by a company from Romania, a container containing, according to the documents, barrels and boxes of fruit pulp was unloaded in a terminal in the Port of Constanța. The container in question was loaded in July 2024 on a ship in the Port of Posorja (Guayas) in Ecuador, being transhipped in the Ports of Tanger Med and Port Said East before being unloaded in Constanța.

Considering certain data and indications according to which high-risk drugs, namely cocaine, are concealed in the food cargo an investigation was launched under the coordination of DIICOT(Directorate for the Investigation of Organized Crime and Terrorism) – Constanța Territorial Service. Teams of Romanian Police, Border Police and customs officers supported this controlled delivery.

Investigators allowed the suspects to continue their journey while closely monitoring them for five days, even using drones.

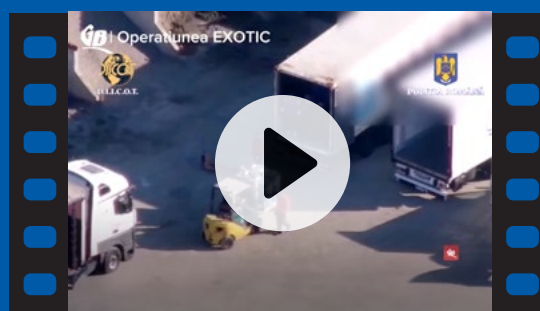
After completing customs formalities, the container was picked up and transported by road to the city of Aiud(located in Alba County, Romania), and 71 barrels containing frozen fruit pulp were transferred to a refrigerated truck. The transfer was made from the maritime container, which held about 16 tons of product packed in 75 plastic barrels, each containing approximately 200 kilograms.

The final destination of the shipment was the Netherlands, where it was supposed to arrive on September 25.

On Tuesday, September 24, with the assistance of the Border Police, the truck was stopped at the Nădlac 1 border crossing point (at the border between Romania and Hungary), and during the inspection(carried out with support from mobile customs teams), cocaine was found in the barrels containing fruit pulp. After the drugs were seized, actions were taken to apprehend the individuals (two Romanian citizens) and execute several search warrants, including in the city of Aiud, where they had set up a warehouse to store part of the transported goods.

„Experience from other agencies and countries that have faced similar situations suggested that there could be a 5-20% concentration of drugs hidden within such a product”.

Deputy Chief Inspector of the Romanian Police declared in mass-media (up to 4 tons of cocaine worth EUR 20 million could be extracted from the amount of frozen fruit seized).



Video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_EyugbxHuE



Indirect Taxation Authority (ITA) discovered drugs in postal shipments at its regional center in Sarajevo

By Božana Jović – NCP Bosnia and Herzegovina
Expert Advisor for International Intelligence Cooperation
UINO – Indirect Taxation Authority

Authorized officials of the ITA discovered 4 shipments of narcotic drugs.

Authorized officials of the ITA discovered four shipments of narcotic drugs. These shipments were found in cooperation with officials from PE Postal Services Sarajevo (JP Pošta Sarajevo) between 01.08 and 01.10.2024, at the Customs Post – Post Office Sarajevo (CR Pošta Sarajevo).

The package shipments originated from EU countries and were intended for individuals in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The shipments were declared under postal customs declarations as items of negligible value, such as coffee, DVDs, and perfume. The method used to conceal the narcotics

involved hiding them within the original packaging of other goods, with the intent to evade customs control.

During a physical inspection of the consignments, PVC bags containing an unknown substance were found inside the coffee packages and the perfume box. The appearance of these bags suggested they contained narcotics. The authorized ITA officials tested the contents using disposable narcotic testers, which confirmed the presence of psychoactive substances, including tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), phenylethylamine, and compounds of the amphetamine class.

As a result of the discovery of psychoactive substances, officers from the Federal Ministry of the Interior (FMUP) and the Federal Police Administration, in cooperation with the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), confiscated the following narcotics:

- Methamphetamine tablets – 960 pieces
- Methamphetamine powder – 1300 grams
- Methamphetamine tablets – 2000 pieces
- Marijuana and hashish – 100 grams

In addition to the above narcotics, in the shipment containing hashish and marijuana, a set for “bumping” locks (i.e., illegal unlocking of locks) was found, disguised as a package resembling a bank card. This package, along with the narcotics, was confiscated.



Insights from Türkiye

By Sinan SÖZCÜ, NCP Türkiye
Assistant Trade Expert,
Directorate General of Customs Enforcement

» ENFORCEMENT PURPOSE ONLY «



During the controls of the luggage of a passenger arriving from Egypt to Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen Airport by Turkish Customs Enforcement officers, animals listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) were detected.

As a result of the investigation, 17 Nile crocodiles, 12 of which were alive and 5 of which were dead, and 10 Nile monitors, 5 of which were alive and 5 of which were dead, were seized after they were determined to have been brought into the country and did not have the necessary documents.

Animals found in the suitcase were delivered to the Nature Conservation and National Parks officials of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Live animals were taken under protection.

28.10.2024

Title: Electronic cigarette device concealed in polyvinyl chloride (pvc) raw material



Issuing date:	2024
Category:	Tobacco Products
Mode of transport:	Sea Cargo

< Case > E-cigarette device concealed
in pvc raw material

- As a result of the intelligence activities carried out by the Mersin Local Unit, it was suspected that there was a different substance in a container carrying PVC raw materials and a search was made due to suspicious density in the container scanned with X-ray, 59,600 electronic cigarette devices worth 36.9 million Turkish Liras were seized.

< Seizure information >

Seized goods:	59.600 E-cigarette devices
Mode of Transport:	Sea Cargo
Route*:	Unknown Country to Türkiye
Concealment:	Inside PVC raw Materials

< Source >

Source: Turkish Customs Administration

Title: Coins in an olive can

Issuing date: 14.10.2024

Category: Cultural Property

< Case >

- A vehicle of a person coming to Akçakale Border Crossing Point (BCP) located in the Şanlıurfa to enter Türkiye was scanned by mobil x-ray within the framework of risk criteria and the vehicle was physically searched upon detection of suspicious densities.
- Any negativity was found in suspicious densities but when 2 olive tins (nine kilograms each) were opened, 1.063 pieces historical artifacts (coins) wrapped in a bag hidden among the olives were seized.

< Seizure information >

Date of seizure: 24.07.2024

Seized goods: Coins -1.063 pieces

Mode of Transport: Passanger car

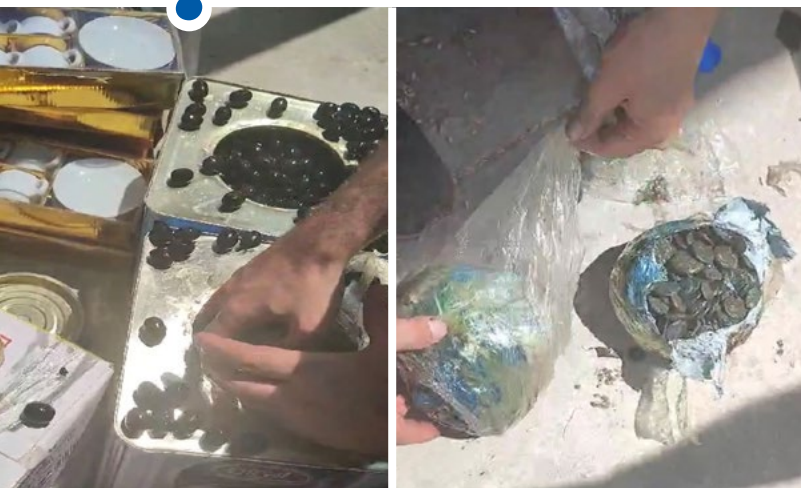
Route*: Syria → **Türkiye**

Concealment: Inside olive cans

< Source >

Source: Turkish Customs Administration

*Red fonts indicate where the seizure made.



Title: Endemic Species in Passanger Belongings

Issuing date: 14.10.2024

Category: Bio-Smuggling – CITES

Mode of transport: Passanger Car

< Case >

In two different seizures made as a result of routine checks at Kapıköy Land BCP in May, a total of 13.950 giant flower bulbs (allium giganteum), belonging to a plant species whose export is prohibited by national legislation because it is an endemic species unique to Anatolia, were seized in the luggage of a total of 9 people who wanted to go to Iran from Türkiye.

< Seizure information >

Date of seizure: 2024

Seized goods: Giant flower bulbs (allium giganteum) – 13.950 pieces

Mode of Transport: Passanger belongings

Route*: **Türkiye** → Iran

Concealment: Carried in a sack

< Source >

Source: Turkish Customs Administration

*Red fonts indicate where the seizure made.



Title: Methamphetamine hidden inside “Semi Processed Talk Powder”

Issuing date: 18.10.2024

Category: Drug

Mode of transport: Land border
– Trailer truck

< Case >

Directorate General of Customs Enforcement Units assessed a shipment coming from Iran, a risky route for methamphetamine smuggling, as risky and dispatched the vehicle to physical check. As a result of controls conducted at Gürbulak BCP, 2 tons 202 kg methamphetamine was seized inside “Semi Processed Talk Powder” cover load.

< Seizure information >

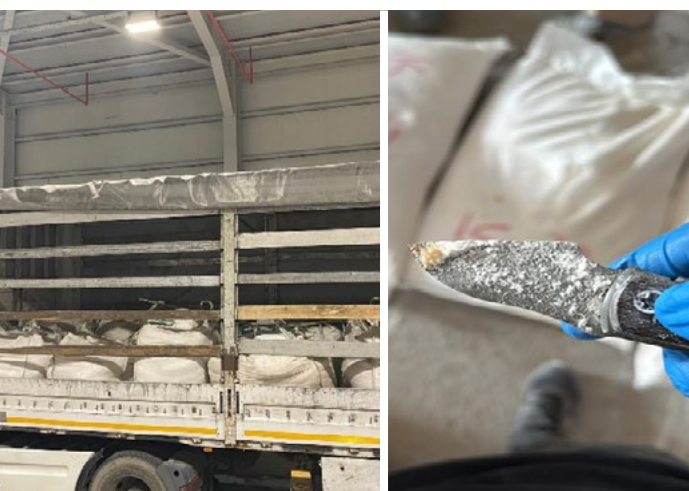
Date of seizure: July 2024

Seized goods: 2 tons 202 kg methamphetamine

Route*: Iran → **Türkiye**

Concealment: Inside cover load

*Red fonts indicate where the seizure made.



Title: Captagon hidden at the bottom of trailer

Issuing date: 18.10.2024

Category: Drug

Mode of transport: Ro-Ro Vessel

< Case >

Directorate General of Customs Enforcement Units assessed a truck coming from Lebanon by a Ro-Ro ship, a risky route and means for captagon smuggling, as risky and dispatched it to physical check. As a result of controls conducted on the truck, 286 kg of captagon was seized at Taşucu Seaport.

< Seizure information >

Date of seizure: August 2024

Seized goods: 1.681.340 captagon tablets (286 kg)

Mode of Transport: Passenger belongings

Route*: Lebanon → **Türkiye**

Concealment: Bottom of trailer

*Red fonts indicate where the seizure made.



Montenegro: The first exchange of customs officers of the Adriatic region within OLAF's "ADRIACUSTOMS" program

By Nenad Vuletic – NCP Montenegro

Customs Administration of Montenegro – Department for Risk Analysis and Intelligence

The officers of the Customs Administration of Montenegro participated in the first exchange of customs officers of the Adriatic region organized by the Italian Customs and Monopolies Agency (ADM), which was held in Brindisi and Bari – Italy in the period 9–13 September 2024. The work-study visit was organized within the framework of OLAF's program "ADRIACUSTOMS" whose goal is to improve cooperation through the exchange of experiences, training between the customs services of Slovenia, Croatia, Albania and Montenegro with the strong support of the Italian Customs Agency.

The Montenegrin delegation consisted of officers from the Anti-smuggling Department and customs officers from the Port of Bar. In addition to customs officials from Montenegro, customs officials from Albania, Slovenia and Croatia also attended this event. As part of this visit, the participants got to know the way of work, the types of controls at various locations: Airports in Brindisi and Bari, as well as in the Ports of Bari and Brindisi.

The purpose of the referred exchange is to better interconnect the countries of the Adriatic region with the aim of faster exchange of information and experiences.

Photo: Port of Bari



Customs and Border Guards cooperation – Mephedrone detected in a family vehicle inside the country

By Agnieszka Ryczek – RILO ECE Chief Expert

In cooperation with Andrzej Piotrowski – RILO ECE Coordinator in Poznań, Junior Expert of Customs at NRA, Poland

Customs Officers of the Wielkopolska National Revenue Administration in Poznań (NRA, Poland) stopped a vehicle for an inspection, in which, according to earlier findings by the Nadbużański Border Guard Unit from the Terespol Branch, large quantities of drugs were supposed to be transported.

During the car inspection, plastic bags with a significant amount of a light substance in the form of granules were found in the luggage compartment. The advanced test showed the substance was Mephedrone – a psychoactive substance.

In total, officers secured over 122 kg of Mephedrone, of high black market value.

The driver travelled together with his wife and 2 year old child to mask smuggling as a family journey. He was accused of transporting a significant amount of drugs, for which he could be sentenced from 3 to 20 years of imprisonment.

What is mephedrone?

Mephedrone, also known as 4-MMC is a synthetic psychoactive substance, a cathinone. It appears in the form of crystals, powder, and tablets. It was first produced in the late 1920s. In 2010, the production and sale of mephedrone in the European Union, including Poland, was made illegal.



Seahorse medications – Increase in smuggling cases in 2024

As Poland Daily 24 reports in its September 2024 article „authorities on the Ukrainian and Belarusian borders encountered numerous attempts to bring seahorse-based medications into the EU”.

Only during August 2024 alone, nearly 700 illegal tablets were seized (CEN ref no: 1765222, 1765225, 1765227, 1765228) according to the Customs and Tax Office in Biała Podlaska (National Revenue Administration Office in Lublin – Poland).



Already, in the year 2024, at the border with Ukraine and Belarus in the Lubelskie Voivodeship, Customs officers foiled 29 attempts of smuggling seahorse medicines.

In the most of the cases, these were tablets with Japanese seahorse extract, while in a several cases they were tablets of crown-of-thorns seahorse.

Both of these species are protected under the provisions of the Washington Convention CITES - the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

As stated in the Convention seahorses extraction for medicinal use is illegal without proper documentation. The travellers transporting these medications did not have the CITES permits and all face criminal charges.

As shown by the disclosures entered into CEN, in the vast majority of cases, travellers transported small quantities of tablets (approx. 100-200 pcs.) across the land border and in a private or collective road transport.

Perhaps they believe that transporting small quantities of products will escape the watchful eye of experienced customs officers.

Seahorse extracts – why is it a popular medicine?

Seahorses have been used in folk medicine for several hundred years, commonly used in traditional Asian medicine. Particularly extracts from Japanese and crowned seahorses, both species threatened with extinction.

Dried seahorses are believed to treat various ailments in traditional Chinese medicine, such as kidney problems, respiratory issues, and impotence. They are often ground into powder and used in herbal concoctions for their perceived therapeutic properties. They are also relatively often bred in aquaria or sold as culinary curiosities.

Unfortunately, demand has over time begun to dangerously threaten the entire population of these unique fish. To prevent the destruction of populations, all seahorses have been protected under the provisions of the Washington Convention CITES.

What does the Washington Convention stands for?

Seahorses were listed on the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) Appendix II in 2002, with implementation as of May 2004.

All species of seahorse (*Hippocampus* spp.) are listed, which means trade can continue but must be managed to ensure it is not detrimental to wild populations, that it is legally sourced, and it must be monitored.

Sale and transport of species protected by the convention is strictly controlled to ensure their survival in the wild. Seahorses, facing global population declines, are fully covered under international law, which prohibits trade in live specimens and derivatives without proper permits. Importantly – it is not only live animals that are protected, but also their parts or products made from them, such as medicines of traditional Asian medicine.

Illegal transport across the border of the European Union, as well as intra-Community trade in specimens of endangered species, is a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment of between three months and five years.



Please remember: Illegal trade fuels destruction of species in the wild!



From September 30 to October 4, 2024, the World Customs Organization (WCO) organized a Risk Management Workshop for the Ethiopian Customs Commission (ECC) in Addis Ababa. This workshop, financially supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), was part of the WCO's Anti-Corruption and Integrity Promotion (A-CIP) Programme, aimed at enhancing ECC's risk management capabilities.

The workshop was co-facilitated by Rafal Pryk from the Polish Customs Administration, a WCO-accredited expert and the RILO ECE Regional Coordinator. Drawing on his extensive experience in risk management, he played a pivotal role in leading the workshop and providing expert guidance throughout the sessions. This workshop followed up on earlier missions in May and November 2023, which laid the groundwork for the development of twenty key recommendations to guide ECC in strengthening their customs risk management framework.

WCO Risk Management Workshop for the Ethiopian Customs Commission (ECC)

By Rafal Pryk,
RILO ECE Coordinator in Warmian-Masurian Customs
and Tax Office in Olsztyn, Poland

Throughout the five-day workshop, participants, including ECC's risk management managers and technical experts, engaged in practical exercises and discussions on key topics such as automated profiling, expanding risk management into security areas, and developing a central risk register. The sessions also addressed improving data extraction methods and enhancing techniques for assessing passenger and cargo risks.

This workshop provided an essential platform for sharing best practices in customs risk management, allowing ECC to further develop its capabilities in profiling and targeting high-risk goods and individuals. Participants were also introduced to the WCO Customs Risk Management Compendium, which offered guidance on applying risk management principles in their operations to promote both trade facilitation and border security.

Organized under the WCO A-CIP Programme, which seeks to combat corruption and promote integrity in customs services, the workshop reflects the WCO's ongoing support for member countries in improving customs efficiency and governance. The Ethiopian Customs Commission expressed its commitment to implementing the knowledge gained during the workshop and further enhancing its risk management processes.



Recent notable seizures by Ukrainian Customs

By Tetiana Kolesnikova – NCP Ukraine

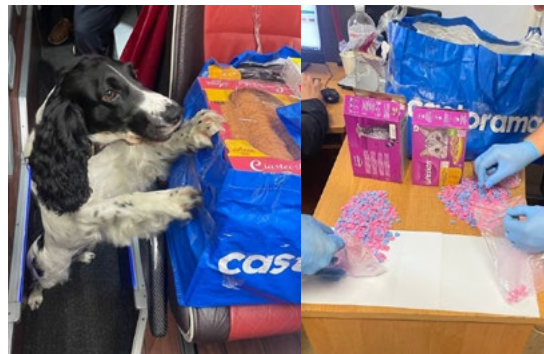
CEN 1773509

On 3 September 2024, Ukrainian customs officers seized 1 kilogram of cannabis at the Lviv post customs office. The drugs were transported via regular post from Prague (PRG), Czech Republic, to Ukraine.



CEN 1772915

On 14 September 2024, Ukrainian customs officers seized 3 kilograms of MDMA ecstasy drug. Seizure was made during a routine control of a regular bus departing from Warsaw to Zaporizhzhia at land boundary in Yahodyn (UKA). The MDMA was concealed inside package of a cat food “Whiskas”.



CEN 1773565

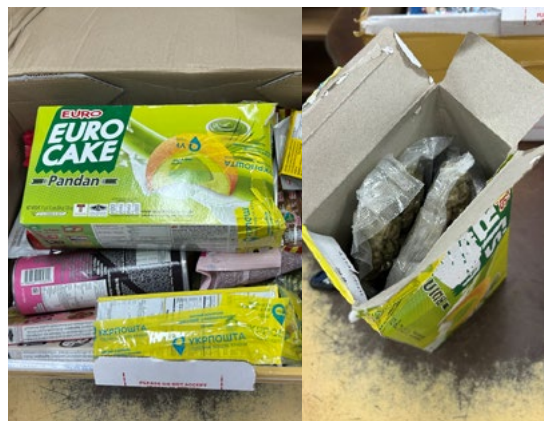
On 23 July 2024, 2,568 stamps of different sizes, denominations, and years were found during a customs inspection of a Volkswagen Transporter. The stamps were being transported by car from Ukraine to Poland without concealment. The offender was a Belgian citizen.



CEN 1776974

CEN 1776974

On September 2024, Ukrainian customs officers seized 2.55 kilograms of cannabis at the Kiev post office. The drugs were found in two parcels sent by regular mail from Thailand to Ukraine. One of the parcels was declared as ‘cookies and sweets,’ and it contained 0.35 kilograms of cannabis (CEN 1776974). The other parcel was declared as a ‘children’s toy set,’ and it contained 2.2 kilograms of cannabis (CEN 1776974).



Close cooperation between Customs, Border & Coast Guard Authorities: Insights from the CONNECTOR project

By Rob Munro and Souzanna Sofou



Making Europe's land and sea borders safer

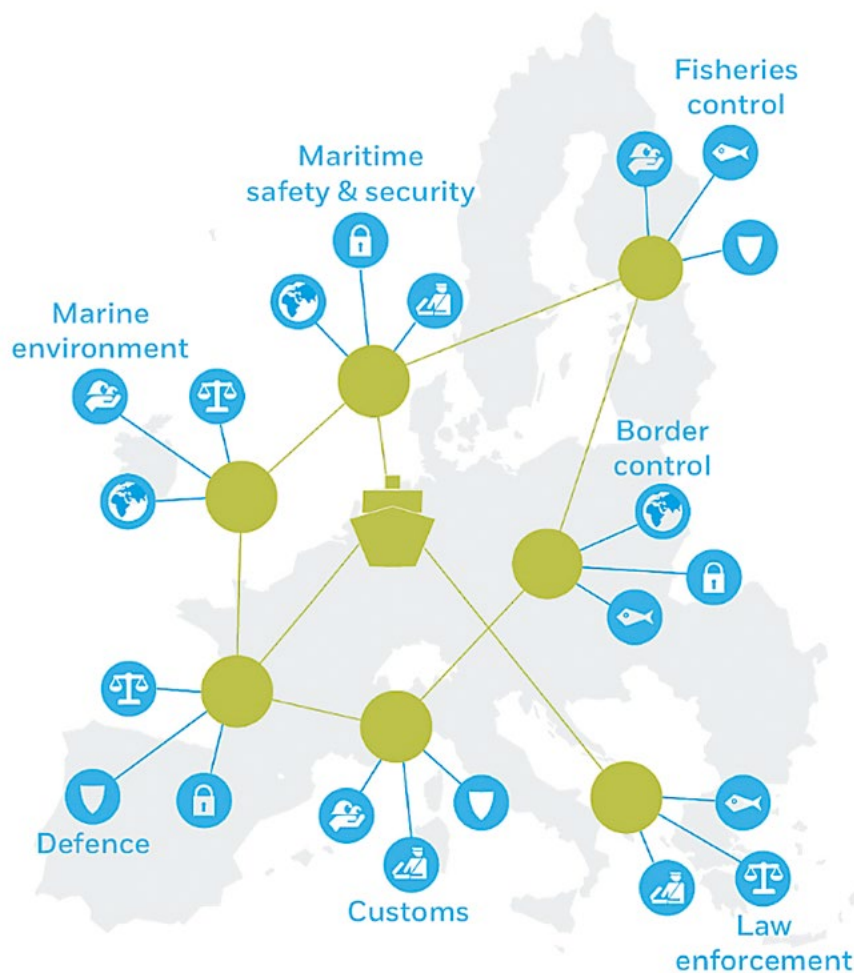
Protecting Europe's land and sea borders is essential to its own and its citizens' security. In the context of the increasingly challenging environment of border control, success will result in controlling cross-border crime, whilst also ensuring a smooth and seamless flow of people and goods.

Contributing to this essential work is CONNECTOR, a Horizon Europe funded research project, which runs for two years from October 1st, 2023 and is jointly funded by the European Union and Switzerland. In very simple terms, CONNECTOR's vision is to contribute to European Integrated Border Management (EIBM) and the EU Customs Action Plan by addressing the need for close cooperation between Customs, Border and Coast Guard Authorities.

Why is CISE needed in the EU maritime domain?

The background to CONNECTOR is the Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE), which is a voluntary network, an infrastructure that connects the systems of over 300 EU/EEA Member States' authorities with responsibility in maritime surveillance. CISE enables them to exchange relevant information across borders and different sectors in a seamless and automated way, leading to an enhanced maritime awareness picture, which ultimately supports more effective operations at sea.

First proposed in 2019, CISE was confirmed in 2024 as one of the key actions supporting the implementation of the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS). From April 2019, the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), in close coordination



with the Member States and relevant EU bodies, has been engaged in the implementation of CISE. In 2024, based on the positive results achieved during the CISE Transitional Phase (2019-2023), the European Commission set up the Operational Phase with the aim of fully implementing CISE in the operational activities of maritime surveillance authorities.

Enhancing the focus on Customs and Border Guards

CONNECTOR is now proposing for the first time an integrated, common and shared risk assessment approach for all border management authorities, taking into account the pan-European common risk indicators for each of the respective end user groups – Customs, Border and Coast Guard Authorities, including FRONTEX.

The results of the two-year project will be the design and development of the CONNECTOR system, and the Customs Extended Common Information Sharing Environment (CE-CISE). Importantly, the technological solutions will be interoperable with the existing CISE systems and will provide an improved level of situational awareness and a Common Operational Picture, which will ultimately support better-informed decision-making both by national and joint response incident commanders.

The project Results will facilitate the close and practical cooperation and information exchange, in addition to a shared risk assessment approach with Command and Control System Instances for each end user group. Full engagement will ultimately ensure the effective management of EU external borders at operational, tactical and strategic



levels. Crucially this will be at both inter-agency and transnational levels, leading unquestionably to safer borders for Europe.

Key Innovations

There are in total six key innovations that are the focus of the technical developments in the project and together have the potential to bring about a significant enhancement to maritime and border control in recent times. Further details of these innovations can be found on the project's website at www.connector-project.eu/our-services

1. CE-CISE for secure, interoperable data sharing between EU Customs and Border authorities
2. Interoperability frameworks in border and customs domains
3. Command and Control systems in border and customs domains
4. Common risk assessment tools and natural language processing (NLP)
5. Decision support systems dedicated to Customs and Border Guards Data fusion techniques with digital twin functionalities
6. Data analytics and data lakes

End user trials to validate the CONNECTOR system

The project involves a total of 17 partners from the EU, Switzerland and Moldova, including SMEs, research organisations, a large enterprise, a state-owned consultancy, and seven Customs, Border and Coast Guard authorities. These are the Romanian Border Police, Moldovan Border Police, Bulgarian Border Police, Hellenic Police, the Hellenic Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy, the Customs Service of the Republic of Moldova and the Spanish Tax Agency.

To confirm its relevance and value for end users, the CONNECTOR system will be tested and validated in real operational environments, using challenging scenarios based on well-defined national, cross-border and transnational use cases during three long-duration trials (Demonstration and Testing) under standardised methodology. All end users will participate in these trials.

These use cases and scenarios have been defined by the Customs and Border and Coast Guards authorities that are partners in the project, and which will be actively involved in the organisation of the trial locations and importantly in the independent assessment and validation of the technology.

Conclusion

CONNECTOR will expand the Common Sharing Information Environment (CISE) networks and data models for use by Customs administrations and other border agencies, using the innovative technology developed during the project as part of the CONNECTOR System. These technological solutions are designed to improve the common operational picture provided to agencies, which will result in better situational awareness, enhanced decision-making and more productive EU cross-border joint operations.

For further information about CONNECTOR, please visit www.connector-project.eu and watch the latest project video at <https://youtu.be/j7pDqd4AUCE>.

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CENTRE FOR RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY HELLAS



WOITSCH CONSULTING



WCO A-CIP Programme roundtable for Ukraine's State Customs Service

Workshops / Meetings / Projects

On 9-13 September 2024 in Przemyśl was held a roundtable with various State Customs Service (SCS) departments responsible for Ukraine SCS's anti-corruption strategy at the Ukrainian-Polish border. The workshop was hosted by the WCO's Anti-Corruption and Integrity Promotion (A-CIP) Programme team and Member experts.

Experts from Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, and Slovakia were invited to share their insights and experiences in combating corruption within Customs. They discussed practical strategies for embedding anti-corruption measures into the daily operations of Customs organizations, emphasizing the importance of transparency, accountability, and consistent enforcement. These experts highlighted specific case studies and best practices, demonstrating how targeted anti-corruption initiatives can strengthen integrity and resilience within Customs frameworks. By sharing these actionable approaches, the experts provided valuable guidance on fostering an organizational culture that actively deters corrupt practices and upholds the highest standards of ethical conduct in Customs work.


RILO ECE actively participated in both the technical and substantive organisation of this roundtable. The RILO ECE was invited to present the overall scope of its activities, which include a variety of activities aimed at collecting, analysing and disseminating data on customs offences in the ECE region. The RILO ECE expert presented the RILO ECE alerts, the projects in which RILO ECE participates and the content published in the Herald. It was also explained how RILO ECE cooperates with international organisations and customs offices worldwide in order to strengthen the detection of new smuggling trends.

The WCO A-CIP Programme, funded by Norway, is a comprehensive initiative that provides technical assistance and capacity-building support to WCO Member administrations implementing integrity-related initiatives in line with the WCO Revised Arusha Declaration. The Programme aims to enhance the integrity and transparency of Customs operations and promote anticorruption efforts.

For more information, please contact capacity.building@wcoomd.org.

Interesting cases



CEN Case number:	1755010
Country:	Poland
Commodity group:	 Beverages


On 27 July 2024 in Supraśl, customs officers of the National Revenue Administration of Poland seized a large quantity of home distilled undenatured ethyl alcohol of an alc. strength by vol. of less than 80% vol. without Polish excise stamps. The seizure was made based on the risk profiling. In the premises of the courtyard, the officers found a forest moonshine factory with equipment for the production of illegal alcohol and 715 litres of moonshine. Near the moonshine factory was an excavated deep well and a waste spillway, which was the residue of alcohol production. The value of the seized beverages was estimated at approximately EUR 5030. The 29 years old perpetrator, who was present at the inspected premises, was charged with illegal alcohol production.

Seizures

CEN Case number:	1749104
Country:	Montenegro
	
Commodity group:	Other prohibitions and restrictions

On 22 July 2024, customs officers of Montenegro seized 86 kg of frozen beef at the Tivat airport. The seizure was made based on the risk profiling. The food was concealed in baggage of a 62 years old Israeli male who had departed from Israel on commercial Israil Airlines flight no. 6H173.



CEN Case number:	1756550
Country:	Hungary
	
Commodity group:	Medicine and Pharmaceutical Products

On 8 August 2024, Hungarian customs officers seized a large quantity of Urogenital Agents at Budapest Airport. The goods had been sent by commercial airlines from Warsaw, Poland. A routine control of an aircraft freight revealed a total of 41 280 expired erectile dysfunction medicines.



CEN Case number:	1772018
Country:	Bulgaria
	
Commodity group:	Drugs

On 9 October 2024, Bulgarian customs officers seized 13.028 kg of powdered cocaine. The seizure was made based on the risk profiling at the Kapitan Andreevo land border crossing as part of Operation BALKAN-INFO. The drugs were transported in a lorry (brand: Iveco, Turkish registration plates) from Germany with the purpose of reaching Istanbul, Türkiye. The transporter was a company from Türkiye. The drugs with the D&G logo were hidden in the clothes of the arrested 36 years old male offender - 11 packages in his jacket and 2 packages in his underwear. The offender was accompanied by a 44 years old male driver. Both were Turkish nationals.



Seizures

CEN Case number:	1754337
Country:	Poland 
Commodity group:	Fauna and Flora



On 4 July 2024, customs officers of the National Revenue Administration of Poland seized a leather handbag made from the skin of a CITES-protected Indian Cobra belonging to the Elapidae family (scientific name: *Naja Naja*). The seizure was made during a routine control at the Medyka border crossing with Ukraine. The goods were found in baggage carried in the car of a 65-year-old female offender from Ukraine. She did not have the necessary permit to transport endangered species as well as products made from them.



A. RILO regions

Acronym	Full name
AP	Asia Pacific
CA	Central Africa
CAM	Central America
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
ECE	Eastern and Central Europe
ESA	East and Southern Africa
JIO	Joint Intelligence Office Caribbean
ME	Middle East
NA	North Africa
SA	South America
WE	Western Europe
WA	Western Africa

B. RILO ECE member countries

Country code	Country name
AL	Albania
BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BG	Bulgaria
EE	Estonia
GE	Georgia
GR	Greece
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
LT	Lithuania
LV	Latvia
MD	Moldova
ME	Montenegro
MK	North Macedonia
PL	Poland
RO	Romania
RS	Serbia
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
TR	Türkiye
UA	Ukraine



National Revenue
Administration



World Customs Organization
Organisation mondiale des douanes



Albania



North
Macedonia



Bosnia and
Herzegovina



Moldova



Bulgaria



Montenegro



Croatia



Poland



Estonia



Romania



Georgia



Serbia



Greece



Slovakia



Hungary



Slovenia



Latvia



Ukraine



Lithuania



Türkiye

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