



INTERPOL

EUROPOL

REPORT

Operation OPSON IV




INTERPOL
TRAFFICKING IN ILLICIT GOODS
AND COUNTERFEITING SUB-DIRECTORATE


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**OPERATION OPSON IV
2014**

TARGETING COUNTERFEIT AND
SUBSTANDARD FOODSTUFF

**TURN
BACK
CRIME**

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KEY ELEMENTS

- **47 countries and 19 private partners**, among them 21 EU MS and 26 non EU countries, participated in Operation OPSON IV. This represents the biggest number of participating countries, especially for non EU countries since the beginning of OPSON, in 2011.
- In total, **11,591.76 tonnes, 814,563.19 litres and 1,233,911 pieces of food, beverages** and other types of goods (side seizures) have been seized in the framework of OPSON IV. These figures are the highest since 2011.
- The first category of seized products was **Flour& Flour Products** (40%). This corresponds to a seizure of 4,360 tonnes of flour in Egypt (infringements of safety regulations). The second biggest category of products seized or withdrawn for markets is **Produce** (33%), which comprises vegetables and fresh products. Food safety infringements such as lack of traceability triggered most seizures. The third category is **Seafood and Fish Products** (7%), with, in some cases, sophisticated fraud schemes to deceive consumers.
- The reported infringements are, in most cases, multiple and combined. The first category of infringements relates to **food safety** (38%), and then to **fiscal infringements** (27%), such as unpaid duties or special taxes. 16% of the reported cases involve an offence to an **intellectual property right**.
- As for previous editions, the operation developed in three phases: the **pre-operational phase**, the operational period and the post operational phase. During the pre-operational phase, partnership developed with the involved private partners led to a training session held at INTERPOL General Secretariat. The two day training addressed more specifically African countries and five European countries. It targeted food products and liquors.
- During the **operational phase**, participating countries reported **3,986 inspections**, and **308 cases (administrative and criminal)**.
- The **debriefing meeting** was hosted by the Czech authorities in Prague in April 2015.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the operational results of operation OPSON IV as well as all related activities developed in this framework. More broadly, it also seeks to assess and evaluate the OPSON initiative in general. Having concluded the fourth edition of the operation, enough intelligence is now available to review the work which has been done since the start of the initiative.

Operation OPSON¹ started in 2011 with ten participating countries, exclusively European Member States. Developed in 2014 and early 2015, OPSON IV encompassed 47 countries from all continents. In total, since the first operational phase, 20,171 tonnes and 1,607,449 litres² of fake and substandard products, in all cases deceiving consumers and often unfit for human consumption, have been seized or withdrawn from markets. Cross borders investigations have been developed and criminal networks involved in the production and distribution of illicit food products have been dismantled.

Since its start, Operation OPSON set clear objectives consisting of:

- protecting public health;
- fighting against organised crime groups involved in the trade of fake and substandard food;
- enhancing international cooperation;
- enhancing national cooperation between LEAs³ and food regulatory agencies; and
- enhancing cooperation with private partners from the food and beverage industry.

These objectives are still valid and efforts to achieve them should be continued.

Since 2011, the fight against food fraud has become a growing concern for all law enforcement bodies, due to the strong impetus given by politicians, notably at the European Union level. Significant steps have been taken towards the development of a more comprehensive approach against counterfeit and substandard food and beverages. They are not all directly derived from OPSON, but from other major events such as the horsemeat scandal in the EU in 2013. In any case, they contribute to a better protection of public health.

Finally, the report endeavours to provide more examples of cases developed in the participating countries. It cannot reflect precisely all activities carried out during the operational phase in 47 countries. However, it intends to give some operational insights, taking into consideration regions, products, quantities, and modus operandi concerned.

This report was adopted by all participating countries.

¹ OPSON (ὄψων) means food in ancient Greek.

² Those figures encompass results since OPSON I in 2011.

³ Refer to Annex 6 for Acronyms and Abbreviations.

1 SCOPE

Operation OPSON, in all its phases, kept the same legal scope and framework targeting:

- Counterfeit food and beverages
- Substandard food and beverages

Food products are defined⁴ 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 Intellectual Property Right. All intellectual property rights defined under national and European law are included.

A substandard food product is defined as a product which does not meet the criteria required by European and national laws 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.

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

2 PARTICIPANTS

2.1 Participating countries, EUROPOL and INTERPOL

The following countries participated in OPSON IV : Austria, Belgium, **Benin**, Belarus, **Botswana**, Bulgaria, **Burundi**, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, **Croatia**, Czech Republic, Denmark, **Ecuador**, **Egypt**, **Eritrea**, **Estonia**, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, **Ireland**, Italy, **Kenya**, Latvia, **Lithuania**, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, **Norway**, **Paraguay**, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Romania, **Rwanda**, South Korea, **South Sudan**, Spain, **Sudan**, Sweden, **Tanzania**, Thailand, Turkey, **Uganda**, **Uruguay**, United Kingdom, USA and Vietnam⁵: 47 in total⁶.

Of note this year is the high number of non-EU countries participating for the first time. With 11 participating countries, among which 10 new countries, Africa has demonstrated its willingness to fight food fraud. The support of the Regional Bureau of Nairobi proved to be a key element to get such a high level of participation from the African continent.

Five countries from Latin America took part in OPSON IV (Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay). Except for Colombia and Peru, they were all new to the platform. This increased participation is the result of the promotion of Operation OPSON during capacity building activities organised by INTERPOL in the region and during the INTERPOL Heads of National Central Bureau Meetings. It also stems from promotion done through conferences and seminars organised by Colombia.

Regarding the Middle East, Egypt participated in OPSON for the first time and reported significant results.

In Europe, some geographical gaps have been filled with the involvement of Estonia and Lithuania, gathering all three Baltic States within the OPSON initiative, and Norway, thus completing the participation of all Nordic countries (together with Denmark, Finland and Sweden). One can hope that Croatia's first participation will trigger involvement of other neighbouring countries.

As for previous phases, 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. In most countries, contact points remained the same as for

⁴ All definitions mentioned here have no legal value but are used in the framework of the operation.

⁵ Please, refer to Annex 1 for the list of agencies/services involved per country.

⁶ Countries participating for the first time are mentioned in bold characters.

OPSON I, II and OPSON III. This contributed to a better implementation of the operational phase. Each contact point gained experience from previous phases, and now liaises more easily with counterparts, at the national level as well as abroad.

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

2.2 Private partners

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

- providing intelligence and risk assessment on their products during the pre-operational phase, including during training sessions tailored for law enforcement services;
- participating in preparatory meetings organised at national level (e.g in Kenya, Thailand ..); and
- providing expertise in legal proceedings when needed.

Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne (CIVC Association of Champagne producers), The Coca Cola Company, Colgate-Palmolive Company, Consorzio di tutela Gorgonzola DOP, Consorzio di tutela Prosecco DOP, Unaprol Consorzio Olivicolo Italiano, Danone Group, Diageo plc, Ferrero Spa, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), International Federation of Spirits Producers (IFSP), Mars, Moët Hennessy, Nestlé, REACT (Association of various right holders), Red Bull, Scotch Whisky Association (SWA), the Tequila Regulatory Council, Unilever.⁷

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

Private partners were asked to join based on:

- their size and presence in the different markets (Europe, USA, Middle East, Africa, South America, Asia), prioritising those most affected by the threat of counterfeiting; and
- 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 in OPSON regarding their brands/products. 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. Countries are also invited to implement such partnerships at national level if deemed relevant.

Two new private partners joined OPSON IV: Mars and GSK. Although GSK does not produce food or beverages, their participation was welcomed and echoed the involvement of Colgate Palmolive. However, the scope of OPSON remains food and beverages and future participating private partners will remain food/drink producers, distributors and food operators in general.

Cooperation was strengthened with companies and associations that joined OPSON III in 2014. As an example, the Tequila Regulatory Council (TRC), an inter-professional organisation protecting the Mexican liquor, provided more operational and strategic intelligence.

3 SCHEDULE OF THE OPERATION

The operation was divided into 3 phases.

3.1 Preparatory phase

Operation OPSON IV was launched in June 2014, during a meeting hosted by the Spanish Authorities (Guardia Civil), in Madrid, Spain. The event gathered together more than 100 participants representing 38 countries. It took place in the Headquarters of *Guardia Civil* and was opened by the General Director of Guardia Civil, Arsenio Fernández de Mesa (see Annex 4 Pictures library).

The pre-operational phase consists of gathering intelligence on the phenomenon, initiating collaboration with private partners and establishing an operational plan. Each country updated the OPSON contact list to initiate this phase and elaborated its own internal profiling and action plan with the relevant stakeholders: law enforcement, regulatory bodies, and private sector.

⁷ For more information on the private partners, especially on their products, please refer to Annex 2: list of participating private companies/associations

In order to provide capacity building support, Europol and INTERPOL organised a training session intended for newcomers and some targeted EU Member States. The event took place at INTERPOL Headquarters on 8-9 October 2014 and had two distinct objectives namely:

- to raise the awareness of 11 African countries on OPSON in order to gain their involvement; and
- to focus on counterfeit whisky, a high risk commodity in some countries.

The training gathered together the following countries: Botswana, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain.

Private contributors were right holders and associations. Each of them presented the threat related to their products and provided useful information for the enforcement of their rights (see Annex 4: Pictures library).

Participants in the event reported positive feedback. Out of the 11 African countries represented, 8 implemented OPSON IV. The training session enabled them to better prepare the operations.

Those events help to target products and operators more efficiently during the operational phase. INTERPOL and Europol encourage any initiative of this kind. The organisation of such training can be made upon request of a country or a company.

3.2 Operational phase

The operational phase spanned two months in December 2014 and January 2015. Some countries also implemented some actions in October and November 2014⁸.

As in previous editions, checks and investigations were carried out on high risk entities in the food and beverage supply chains. Each participating country independently decided on 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 on-going actions.

Finally, the participating countries sent all available results to Europol and INTERPOL which centralised them.

3.3 Post operational phase

The results of the operational phase were due to be sent before 10/02/2015. From February 2015 to April 2015, INTERPOL and Europol analysed the data to assess the threat, identify best practices and areas of improvement. A debriefing meeting was held in April 2015, with the support of the Czech National Police and Czech Customs.

This report was discussed during this event. It was finalised after the debriefing meeting and incorporated some of the case examples presented by the NCP.

4 RESULTS OF THE OPERATIONAL PHASE

4.1 Received results and elaboration of the statistics

Results of the operation were to be sent in a formatted way to Europol and INTERPOL.

Thresholds for seizures to be reported were established at:

- 5 kilograms
- 5 litres
- 10 pieces

These limits were set in order to provide the most meaningful statistics.

4.2 Seizures, checks and investigations

All participating countries carried out checks throughout their national territory.

4.2.1 Overall figures

In the framework of the operation, **3,986 inspections** were carried out, and **308 administrative and criminal cases** were initiated⁹.

⁸ USA and Spain developed checks in October and November 2014.

Statistics presented below are based on those reported cases, and all other elements reported as results by the participating countries.

As the number of checks and inspections is not reported by all countries, it is believed that actual figures concerning the enforcement activities implemented in each country are in reality much higher.

As examples, Spain reported that, in total, 2,450 checks and controls were carried out throughout the national territory; in wholesalers' facilities, retail shops, supermarkets, means of transport, warehouses. 1,590 administrative infringements were discovered, regarding sanitary and fiscal regulations (irregularities with labelling, expiry dates, storage conditions etc...). 825 individuals were charged. Moreover, 7 criminal offences involving 26 detained and 71 charged persons were reported. In total, Spanish authorities seized almost 587 tonnes of food and 506,000 litres of drinks, these figures exclude seizures of illicit medicines (663,000 fraudulent pharmaceutical products). Those results are superior to results obtained in OPSON III, except for the number of administrative infringements (1,663 infringements reported in 2014). This could mean checks have raised awareness among legitimate food business operators that endeavour to comply with regulations. Most seized products in Spain were fish and seafood, meat and meat products and dairy products.

In Colombia, the total value of apprehended and seized goods amount to almost COP 1,178,000,000 (approximately USD 494,000 and EUR 459,600). Goods originated from Ecuador and Venezuela.

Belgium carried out OPSON IV during two weeks, with joint inspections (Food Agency and Customs) in the ports of Antwerp and Zeebrugge and in Zaventem airport (biggest airport in Belgium, located near Brussels). During this period, 90 containers were physically inspected and 6 infringements were discovered. 39 shipments were checked in Zaventem, with the same result: 6 infringements reported.

In eight East African countries, 56 criminal investigations have been opened based on the conducted interventions.

There were no seizures or products withdrawn from the market in Austria, Finland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, and Norway.

Results have been divided into two broad categories: foodstuff and side seizures. When seizures were not clearly specified, *i.e.* '49 tonnes of food products seized', quantities have been added as 'unidentified'.

9 A case is an inspection that led to the notification of an infringement and/or a seizure or withdrawal of products. An inspection or a check is a control activity and does not always lead to a seizure. Unfortunately, the number of cases reported is not completely accurate as some inconsistencies remained in the reported results, and not all countries reported the global number of checks done at national level.

- **The seized quantities** are as follows¹⁰:

a. Identified	
Unit of measurement	Quantity
Tonnes	10,913.84
Litres	373,445.19
Pieces	341,175

b. Unidentified	
Unit of measurement	Quantity
Tonnes	677.92
Litres	441,118
Pieces	892,736

c. Livestock		
Cattle	Pigs	Poultry
5,929	21	222
Total 6,172		

In total, **11,591.76 tonnes, 814,563.19 litres** and **1,233,911 pieces** of food, beverages and other types of good (side seizures) have been seized in the framework of OPSON IV.

Food products have been counted by weight (kg) and volume (litres).

All seizures (by measurement unit) were categorised into the following groups: Beverages & Soft Drinks, Flour & Flour Products (including pasta), Cereals & Grains, Coffee, Tea & Cocoa, Condiments, Honey, Confectionary, Dry Fruits, Produce (includes fresh fruit and vegetables), Fish & Seafood, Meat & Meat Products, Dairy Products, Processed Food (e.g. pickles, chips, snacks), Food Supplements, and Pet Food.

¹⁰ Seized quantities in OPSON III are mentioned in Annex 3. Please refer to it for more details on the statistics.

The proportion of seizures by **type of products** is as follows:

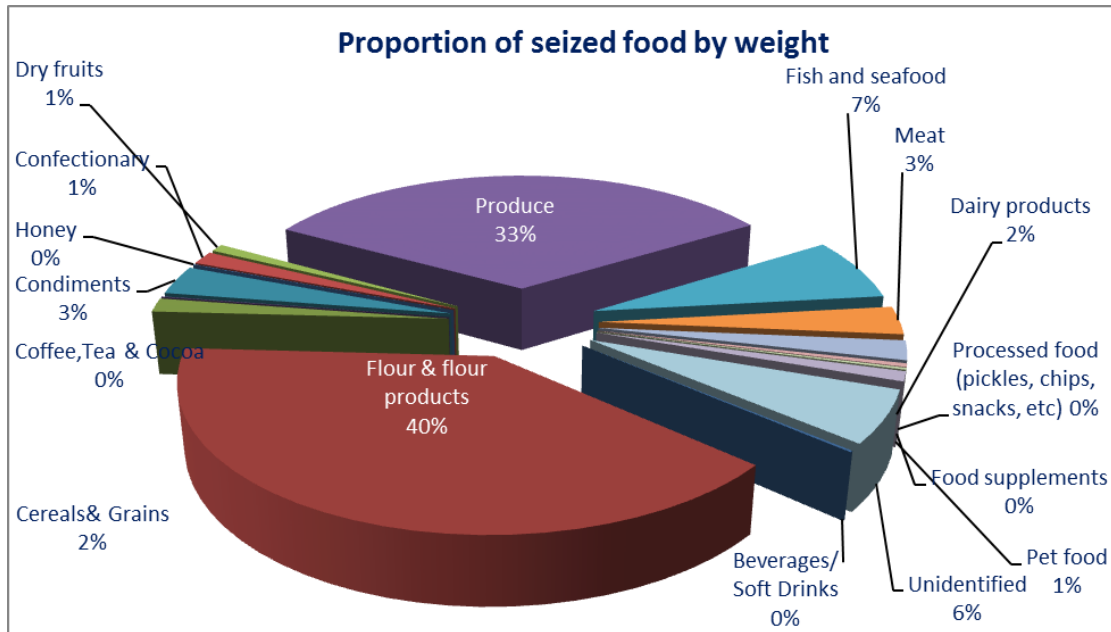


Chart 1

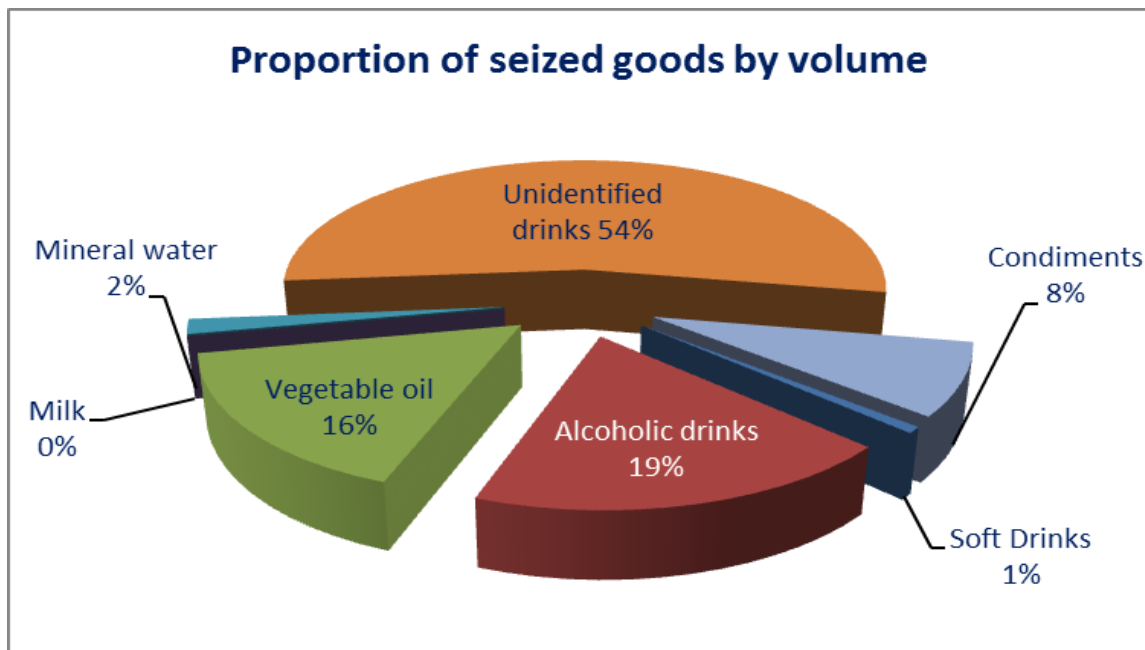


Chart 2

Types of seized products by weight (kg) and by volume (litres)

The first chart illustrates the overall proportion of seized goods measured by weight and shows that the two main seized commodities were *Flour & Flour Products* (40%) and *Produce* (33%). The biggest seizure was made in Egypt with almost 4,360 tonnes of flour. However, it should be mentioned that this seizure is an outlier¹¹: it is so high it shapes the overall results of the entire operation. If this seizure is removed from the results, *Flour and Flour Products* would represent just 3% of the total seizures. *Produce* becomes then the largest category (53% - over 3,831 tonnes), followed by *Fish and Seafood*

¹¹ In statistics, an outlier is an observation point that is distant from other observations; for the accuracy of the results, outliers are sometimes excluded from datasets.

(11% - nearly 819 tonnes) and *Condiments* (5% - over 179 tonnes). While types of products seized vary regionally, goods in the *Produce* category were seized across all the regions (16 countries) and represent either the largest or second largest category in all the regions, except Africa (please refer to Annex 3: Detailed statistics for the detailed breakdown showing proportion of seized goods by weight and region).

The category *Produce* involves a great variety of fresh fruit and vegetables with major seizures occurring in Europe (both EU and non-EU members) and Latin America. Czech Authorities seized 58 tonnes of bamboo sprouts originating from China. Analysis revealed they were infected with pests and fungus.

For *Cereals & Grains*, the two most seized commodities were buckwheat and rice and the largest seizures were carried out in Belarus, Egypt and the USA. An interesting case was reported in Uganda, where counterfeit maize/corn agricultural seeds were seized.

The category *Pet Food* represents around 1% out of the total seizures. It includes regular pet food as well as food used to feed farm animals (around 79% of the category). The *Fish and Seafood* category also features seizures of red and black caviar.

The 'zero percentage' segments of the chart (i.e. *Honey, Coffee/Tea/Cocoa, Food Supplements, etc...*) refers only to the statistical proportion of relevant seizures, whereas real numbers are still significant among them over 4 tonnes of seized honey, nearly 7 tonnes of seized products in *Coffee, Tea and Cocoa* category, over 2.6 tonnes of seized *Food Supplements, etc...*

For *Dairy Products* and *Condiments*, products are divided as follow (products measured in kilograms)

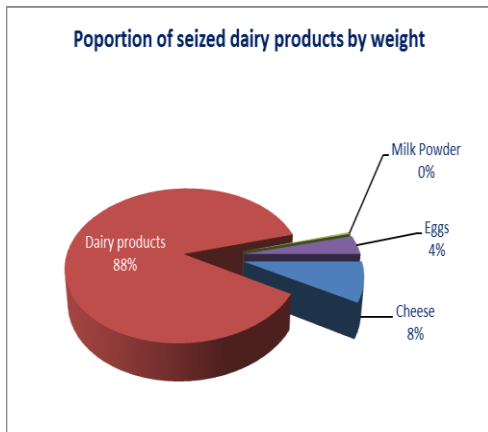


Chart 3

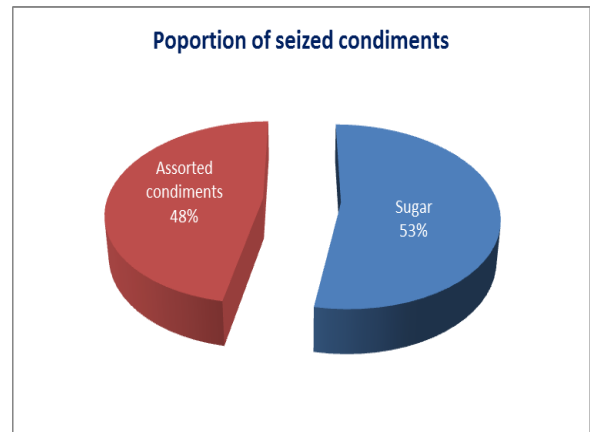


Chart 4

Goods in the *Dairy Products* category were seized in Belarus, Egypt, Italy and Turkey. The largest seizures comprised butter, yogurt, cream and condensed milk. Goods in this category were seized predominantly under food security and fiscal infringement provisions.

Goods measured in litres (by volume) were grouped in the following categories: *Soft Drinks, Beer, Wine* (including *Champagne wine*), *High Volume Alcohol, Edible Oil, Milk, Mineral Water, Condiments, and Unidentified drinks*. In the chart above (chart 1), all alcoholic drinks were merged into one category¹². More than half of the seizures are unknown drinks. This lack of data prevents from performing accurate analysis on beverages.

¹² More details on seized alcohol are available in Annex 3.

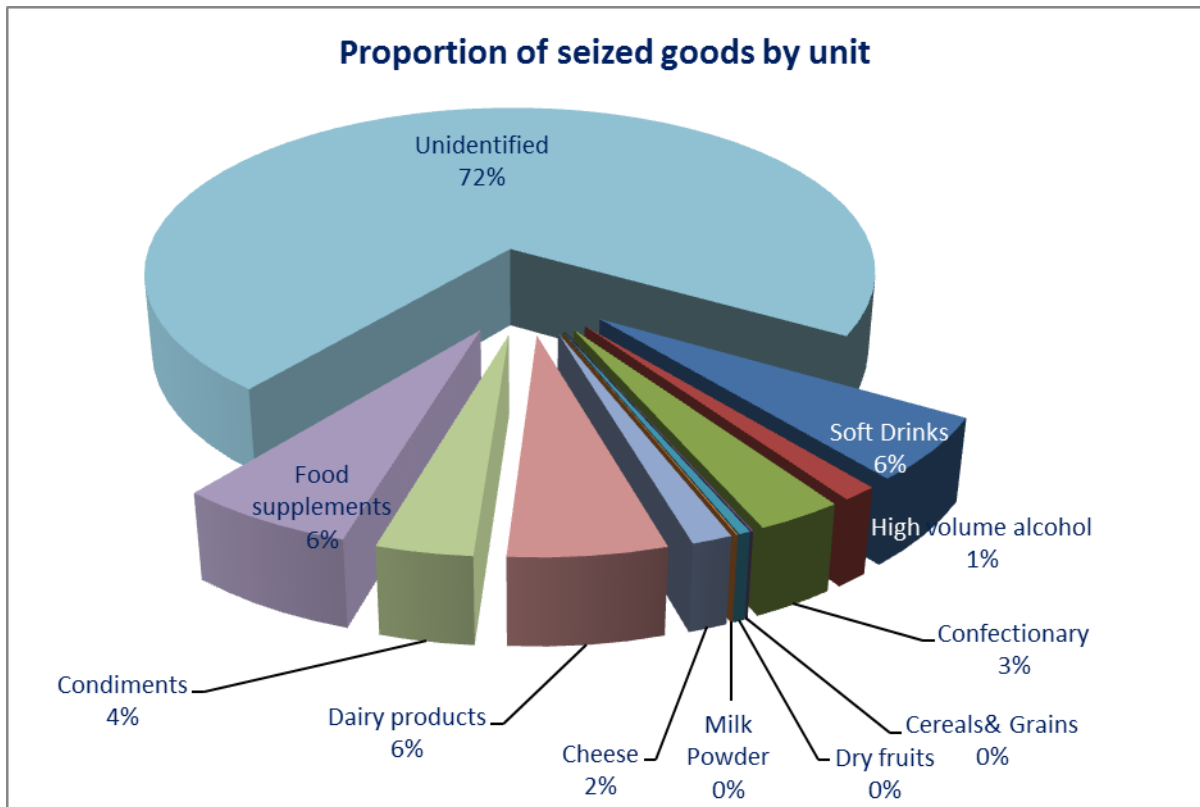


Chart 5

Products seized in pieces, including pre-packaged products

Regarding goods measured in pieces, more than 72% of the seized goods were unidentified, thus preventing a clear analysis on those types of goods.

The largest categories among the identified seized goods measured by unit are *Soft Drinks*, *Food Supplements* and *Dairy Products*. The biggest seizure in the *Soft Drinks* category took place in Turkey, where nearly 70,000 units of counterfeit energy drinks were confiscated (this represent about 99% of this category). The biggest seizure of food supplements was done in Spain and involved substandard vitamins and dietary minerals (80% of this category). Food supplements were also confiscated in Bulgaria, Lithuania, Turkey, the USA and Vietnam.

Likewise, 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** are as follows:

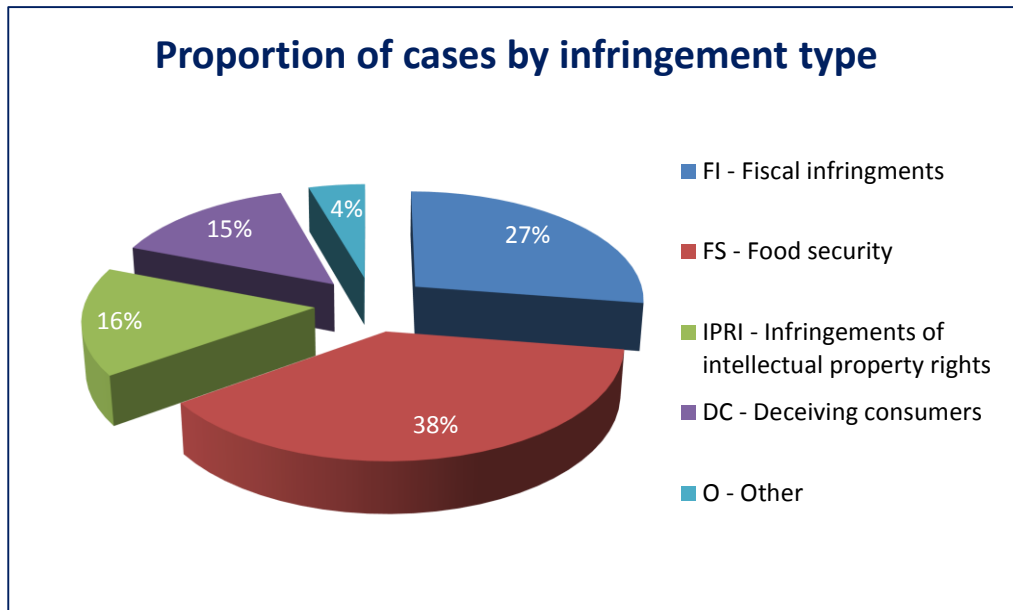


Chart 6

Types of infringements by number of cases¹³

The majority of the reported cases where the infringement is specified represented breaches of food/health regulations. Unfortunately, in most of the cases, the infringement was not specified. Those cases have been removed from the chart.

Some seizures were not marked with any offence and due to the lack of detail, it was not always possible to assign the offence while processing data. While in the majority of the cases (over 60%) the infringement was not specified, statistical results can still be extrapolated using the overall provided data and comparing regional information. Many seizures were marked with two or more offences simultaneously.

- Side seizures**

As mentioned in the operational plan, seizures of goods which were neither food nor beverages but which resulted from activities carried out within the framework of OPSON have been included in the results.

Results show that medicines represent the biggest category in side seizures. Most of them occurred in African countries. However, other countries also seized illicit medicines in the course of OPSON, such as the USA. In Belgium, Customs seized food supplements containing active ingredients (Thiosildenafil, paracetamol) and should therefore have been considered as medicines. Those illicit goods were counted in the category *Food Supplements*.

Side seizures were measured by weight (kilograms), volume (litres) and individual units (pre-packaged items, cigarettes packages, pill...). Comparison of side seizures measured by units is not relevant statistically. The table below summarises the seized items by numbers.

¹³ Cases were categorised in the following infringements

Infringements
FI = fiscal infringement Example : alcohol duties
DC = deceiving consumers Example: falsely labelled extra virgin olive oil
FS = food safety Example : infringement related to the storage conditions of the goods
IPRI = Intellectual Property Rights Infringement Example: all IPR, including appellations of origins

Seized goods measured by unit								
Cosmetics	Cigarettes & tobacco products	Auto spare parts	Household items	Gas cylinders	Packing materials	Print cartridges	Toys	Pharmaceuticals
14,195	151,140	16	10,056	10,590	53,846	170	1,457	760,786

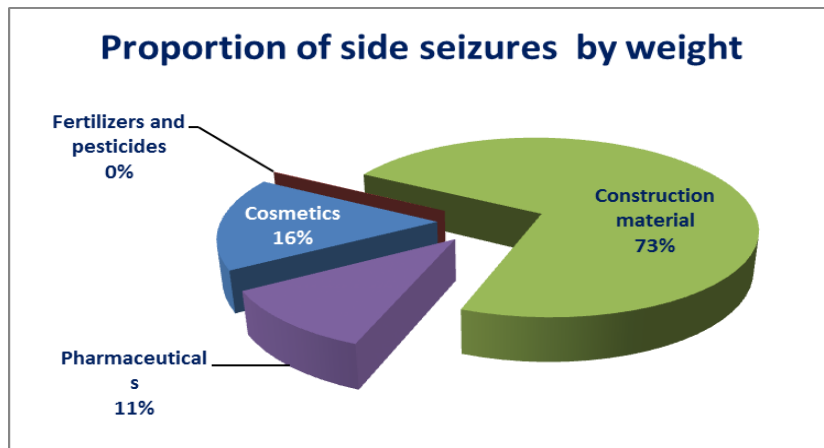


Chart 7

Types of goods seized as side seizures and measured by Kg

The largest category corresponds to *Construction Materials* and includes counterfeit cement and counterfeit reinforced steel bars seized in Sudan.

The only side seizure measured in litres took place in Peru: the Peruvian National Police seized 21,500 litres of diesel (fiscal infringement).

• **Follow up of OPSON III**

Cases initiated during previous operational phases of OPSON, especially OPSON III, were developed afterwards. Therefore, actions performed during OPSON IV were reported by the countries as the newest developments of investigations launched during OPSON III. As such, Spain reported this year several seizures totalling 8,074 bottles of counterfeit rum, in the aftermath of an investigation developed in December 2013 where 7,530 bottles of fraudulent rum had already been discovered. Interviews and house searches also led to charges against one suspect.

Following information from the spirit industry transmitted in 2013, Italy seized 3,500 bottles of fraudulent whisky and arrested three persons in October 2014. The liquor did not comply with the European regulation on Whisky¹⁴ and therefore could not be labelled as such.

Those two examples achieve one of the objectives of OPSON, namely to develop investigations on food fraud even outside the timeframe of the operational phase.

4.2.2 Case examples

The following cases illustrate the diversity of food fraud and the different types of risks. They were chosen because they reflect the variety and the extent of food fraud, when it comes to the types of infringements, the products and modus operandi. They constitute only a small sample of what has been developed during the operational phase.

14 Regulation EC No 110/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 January 2008 on the definition, description, presentation, labelling and the protection of geographical indications of spirit drinks.

United Kingdom

An illicit factory producing fake name-brand vodka was discovered by Derbyshire County Council Trading Standards team. Officers discovered more than 20,000 empty bottles ready for filling, hundreds of empty five-litre antifreeze containers which had been used to make the counterfeit alcohol, as well as a reverse osmosis unit used to remove the chemical's colour and smell.

A large quantity of fake bottle tops, hundreds of unauthorised boxes marked with the brand and used labels were also seized.



Raid of an illicit factory in Derbyshire producing counterfeit vodka

Italy

In Arezzo, Tuscany officers from the Carabinieri NAS discovered a fish processing facility selling previously frozen seafood as fresh. The seafood had been sprayed with a chemical containing citric acid, phosphate and hydrogen peroxide to disguise the fact that it was rotting.

More than 30 tonnes of seafood were seized at the site in addition to 1.6 tonnes of chemicals.

After identifying links to a second company in Spain, cooperation between the Carabinieri and the Spanish Guardia Civil led to the interception of a consignment of another 15 tonnes of fish which was due for delivery to Italy.

In a second case, in Salerno in Southern Italy, Carabinieri detected a new modus operandi in relation to the production of fake mozzarella.

During a check at a cheese factory, officers found a large amount of curd originating from Eastern Europe in addition to other dairy products which were already past their expiration date, or were not being stored in compliance with regulations. The presence of chemicals including citric acid and sodium hypochlorite suggested the dairy products were being treated to give it the appearance of fresh mozzarella.

The mozzarella was then being smoked in the back of a van, with rubbish being burned as one of the heat sources.

Videos available:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amUN4trXR1Y>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxrTsPEI4Nw>

Spain

More than 2,400 checks and inspections were carried out during Opson IV resulting in the identification of a company selling coffee labelled as 100 per cent Arabica which was actually a mix of different low quality coffees. The three managers have been charged following the joint investigation by the Guardia Civil, Laboratories of the Ministry of Agriculture (MAGRAMA) and the National Agency for Consumers, Food safety and Nutrition (AECOSAN).



Inspections carried out in Spain

France

French customs seized nearly 4,000 kg of counterfeit strawberries at Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport. In addition, some 10kg of caviar were discovered in passenger luggage during targeted checks at the airport.



Counterfeit strawberries



Seizure of 10kg of caviar carried by an individual

Belgium

Joint inspections by Belgian Customs and the Food Safety Agency at Antwerp and Zeebrugge harbours and Zaventem airport resulted in the seizure of food supplements allegedly derived from traditional Chinese medicines. Analysis of the product showed they contained high concentrations of Mercury.



Illicit Food Supplements

USA

With postal systems increasingly being used by traffickers, the USA's Food and Drugs Administration focused on packages sent through the mail. Parcels inspections carried out at Los Angeles Airport led to the seizure of illicit substances, including dietary supplements, and the opening of criminal investigations.

And also...

- Officials in Côte d'Ivoire seized 18 tonnes of energy drinks imported from Brazil.
- Nearly 200 boxes of banned sweets seized in Tanzania.
- In Colombia the Criminal Investigation Department dismantled an organised crime network behind the production, distribution and sale of fake whisky and Aguardiente.
- 20 tonnes of dried apricots containing excessive levels of sulphites were discovered in Estonia.
- Egyptian authorities seized 35 tonnes of fake butter and dismantled a factory producing fake tea.
- Police in Belarus stopped a truck illegally transporting 8,500 kg of eggs using forged quality certificates.
- Empty counterfeit bottles of mineral water were seized in Norway.
- 85 tonnes of meat illegally imported into Thailand without testing to ensure they complied with health and safety regulations were destroyed.
- An unlicensed water bottling plant was shut down in South Sudan.

5 COMMUNICATION POLICY

INTERPOL and Europol published a joint press release on 16/02/2015 (Annex 5). The document was available on both INTERPOL and Europol websites. This year, two separate documents were edited: a press release summarising main figures and actions of the operational phase, and a document presenting case stories (see 4.2.2 Case examples). Reported cases to the media have been selected by Europol and INTERPOL on the basis of communication criteria, using available visuals. In any case does this choice reflect any prioritisation or hierarchy among the reported results.

Media coverage was good, and concerned most of the participating countries (national coverage). INTERPOL and Europol coordinated contact with the press and, when relevant, provided media with contact details for the relevant OPSON Contact points.

6 OVERALL EVALUATION OF OPSON SINCE 2011

OPSON had substantial political repercussions and shed light on food fraud and the involvement of organised crime in the food business. Other events, in some cases with lethal consequences, such as the deaths of more than 50 persons in the Czech Republic also contributed to bring the fight against food fraud to the fore. The horsemeat scandal affected numerous EU countries in 2013 and led to criminal prosecutions in France and the Netherlands. Since 2011, the accomplishments mentioned below are to be reported.

- **Increased political involvement from EU countries**

Since the first implementation of OPSON, the following actions/recommendations/legislation have been taken/adopted at EU level:

- The fight against *OCGs involved in the production and distribution of counterfeit goods violating health, safety and food regulations and those producing sub-standard goods* has been endorsed by the Council of the EU as a priority in the fight against serious and organised crime between 2014 and 2017¹⁵;
- European Parliament adopted a resolution on food fraud in January 2014, on the basis of a report delivered by the ENVI committee¹⁶. The text called for more cooperation between agencies and countries¹⁷;
- In December 2014, the European Council - Justice and Home Affairs Committee adopted conclusions on the role of law enforcement cooperation in combating food crime¹⁸. The text recognises the involvement of organised crime in the production and distribution of illicit and counterfeit food products. It invites Member States to encourage operational cooperation between all competent authorities, including the sending of information related to Food Crime to Europol.

- **Enlargement of the OPSON network**

Operation OPSON has clearly demonstrated that food fraud is a global phenomenon. Cases were built in 47 countries: 11 in Africa, 6 in North/South America, 4 in Asia, 25 in Europe, 1 in Middle-East.

In addition, new countries expressed their willingness to join the platform. This increasing participation reveals the global dimension of food crime.

- **Increased awareness among consumers**

Media coverage has significantly developed on food fraud. OPSON and law enforcement activities against illicit food triggered documentaries, articles and books. All of these communication tools contributed to raising consumers' attention.

¹⁵ Council conclusions on setting the EU's priorities for the fight against serious and organised crime between 2014 and 2017 – Justice and Home Affairs – 6/7 June 2013, Luxembourg

¹⁶ Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

¹⁷ European Parliament Resolution of 14 January 2014 on the food crisis, fraud in the food chain and the control thereof (2013/2091(INI))

¹⁸ Council Conclusions on the role of law enforcement cooperation in combating food crime (doc 15623/14) - 3354th Council Meeting – Justice and Home Affairs, Brussels, 4 and 5 December 2014 16526/14

From **an operational perspective**, it is to be reported that many investigations initiated in the framework of OPSON developed into crossborder cases, with final objective the dismantlement of the criminal groups involved.

Analysis of the results provided by participating countries since OPSON I allowed Europol and INTERPOL to draw conclusions regarding modus operandi, types of goods and infringements depending on the geographical area. For the first time, data on food fraud takes into consideration criminal activities and not only administrative offences.

Last but not least, a solid public-private partnership has been established. Cooperation with some of the participating private companies developed into an efficient working relationship, which included the transmission of intelligence leading to enforcement actions, as well as support on the field during those actions.

However, margins of improvement remain:

- **Geographical gaps**

Some countries still do not take part in the initiative when intelligence shows that they are affected by the threat. INTERPOL and Europol are working on the involvement of more countries in the initiative.

- **Cooperation among all stakeholders**

It appears communication between LEAs, Food Agencies and private companies remains challenging in some participating countries. Likewise, greater involvement of all private sector representatives in the operation would be beneficial.

- **Identification of new actors**

Mutual knowledge and cooperation are vital in order to act efficiently, without duplication of efforts or even contradictory measures. In this regard, some potential partners still need to be identified and contacted.

- **Exchange of information**

Transnational operational cooperation can still be deepened in order to fully dismantle the criminal groups involved, and tackle all aspects of their activities, including the financial side.

7 CONCLUSION

In its fourth phase, operation OPSON has now gained structure and efficiency from previous experiences, allowing a finer analysis of results and threats. Alcohol, seafood as well as cereals and grains but also flour constitute high risk goods. Complex cross border investigations have resulted from previous phases, and developed outside of the operational timeframe, demonstrating the involvement of organised crime groups in food fraud. Moreover, each phase saw the emergence of new types of falsified edible items, such as pet food or livestock, and different types of infringement according to the new participating countries. Therefore, efforts should be maintained, especially regarding cooperation between agencies as well as countries. The OPSON network bears more fruits each year. National OPSON Contact Points now interact well with their counterparts, and this result in more transnational cases. The general assessment of OPSON is above satisfactory, and leads to the conclusion that the initiative should be continued.

The potential involvement of new countries will certainly open new perspectives and bring more results in terms of seizures. It reflects the strong political will of the governments in the fight against food fraud.

INTERPOL and Europol will pursue their fruitful partnership in order to fight against transnational food and beverage trafficking and to protect consumers. Both organizations will continue to facilitate international cooperation and support the countries' involvement in this initiative.

8 ANNEXES

Annex 1: Participating countries/agencies

Annex 2: Private Sector/Associations

Annex 3: Detailed statistics

Annex 4: Pictures library

Annex 5: INTERPOL/EUROPOL Press release

Annex 6: Acronyms and Abbreviations

Annex 1: Participating countries/agencies

The following agencies/administrations of each country participated in OPSON IV.
In total, this represented 47 countries, with 114 agencies.

Countries	Administrations/LEAs
European Member States (Exchange of information via Europol)	
Austria – AT	Federal Police
Belgium - BE	Customs Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FASFC)
Bulgaria – BG	Ministry of Interior: General Directorate of the National Police Customs Bulgarian Food Safety Agency
Croatia – HR	Customs
Czech Republic – CZ	Customs Police
Denmark – DK	Veterinary and Food Administration Tax and Customs Administration (SKAT)
Estonia – EE	Customs
Finland - FI	Customs
France – FR	Customs Central Office for Coordinating Environment and Health Crime (OCLAESP – Police, Gendarmerie) Directorate for Competition, Consumption and Fraud Control (DGCCRF – Ministry of Finance) Food Directorate (Ministry of Agriculture)
Hungary – HU	National Tax and Customs Authorities (NAV) International Law Enforcement Cooperation Centre (NEBEK)
Ireland – IE	Food Safety Authority Customs Police (An Garda Síochána)
Italy – IT	Arma dei Carabinieri Guardia di Finanza Corpo Forestale dello Stato Guardia Costiera Customs (Agenzia delle Dogane)
Latvia – LV	Customs Food and veterinary services

Lithuania – LT	Customs State Food and Veterinary Service
Luxembourg – LU	Customs
The Netherlands – NL	Food Safety Agency (NVWA)
Portugal – PT	Customs and Tax Authority Food and Economic Safety Agency (ASAE)
Romania – RO	Police
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 (SLV)
United Kingdom – UK	Intellectual Property Office (IPO) Food Standards Agency (FSA) Trading Standards Authorities (TSA) Revenues and Customs (HMRC) Police National Crime Agency (NCA) Border Force (UKBF)
EU COM	DG Health (DG SANTÉ)
Third countries – Exchange of information via Europol (Operational agreement)	
Colombia – CO	Fiscal Police – National Police (Policía Nacional – Dirección de gestión de policía fiscal y aduanera)
Norway – NO	Customs
Iceland – IS	Customs
United States of America - USA	Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
Third countries – Exchange of information via INTERPOL	
Benin – BJ	Customs
Belarus – BY	Police Customs
Botswana – BW	Police

**Unclassified – Basic Protection Level
PUBLIC VERSION**

Burundi - BI	Police Customs Public Health Bureau of Standards
Côte d'Ivoire – CI	Police Customs Food Regulatory Authority
Ecuador – EC	Police Prosecution Office Ministry of Public Health and Agriculture
Egypt – EG	Police
Eritrea – ER	Police Customs Directorate of Public Prosecutions
Kenya – KE	Police Customs Kenya Bureau of Standards Anti-counterfeiting Agency
Paraguay – PY	Police
Peru – PE	Police Customs, Tax Administration Immigration
Philippines – PH	Police Food Regulatory Authority
Rwanda - RW	Police Customs Bureau of Standards Ministry of Health and Agriculture
Republic of Korea – KR	Korea National Police Ministry of Food and Drug Safety
South Sudan	Police Customs Ministry of Health Bureau of Standards Public Prosecution Office
Sudan – SD	Police Customs Public Prosecution Office Health and Safety Directorate

Tanzania – TZ	Police Customs Tanzania Food Drug Authority Tanzania Bureau of Standards Director of Public Prosecutions Fair Competition Commission
Thailand – TH	Police Customs Food Regulatory Authority
Turkey – TK	Police State Security
Uganda – UG	Police Customs Bureau of Standards National Drugs Authority
Uruguay – UY	Police Customs
Vietnam – VN	Police Customs Ministry of Public Health

Annex 2: Participation of the private sector

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
The Coca Cola Company – firm	Non-alcoholic beverages, trademarks protected
Colgate-Palmolive Company – firm	Healthcare products, especially dental care, trademarks protected ¹⁹
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
Danone Group – firm	4 types of edible goods and beverages: fresh dairy products, waters, baby nutrition and medical nutrition, trademarks protected
Diageo – firm	Spirits and liquors, trademarks protected
Ferrero Spa – firm	Mainly confectionery, trademarks protected
GlaxoSmithKline – firm	Pharmaceutical products and oral care products, trademarks protected ²⁰
IFSP International Federation of Spirits Producers – producers association	Spirits and liquors, trademarks protected
Mars – Firm	Various edible goods and drinks, ranging from chocolate, candies, pet food and rice, 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
Red Bull – Firm	Energy drink, trademark protected
Scotch Whisky association – producers association	Scotch Whisky, trademark and geographical indication protected
Tequila Regulatory Council – producers association	Mexican liquor, geographical indication and trademarks protected
Unilever – Firm	Various edible goods ranging from ice creams to soups, tea, coffee and condiments, trademarks protected

18 firms and associations participated in OPSON IV.

¹⁹ Seized products infringing the rights of the Colgate Palmolive Company were considered as side seizures, as they were neither food nor beverages.

²⁰ Seized products infringing the rights of GSK were considered as side seizures, as they were neither food nor beverages. Pharmaceutical products are not included in the scope of OPSON. GSK provided intelligence on their oral care products only.

Annex 3: Detailed statistics

The charts below provide information on the evolution of the figures since OPSON II, as well as data regarding the types of infringements reported in OPSON IV. Results of OPSON I were not taken into consideration for reasons of consistency. Seized products in OPSON I were counted differently than in the other phases, thus preventing from establishing meaningful comparisons.

- **Seizures since 2012 (OPSON II to OPSON IV)**

OPSON II - 29 countries	
<i>Unit of measurement</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Tonnes	262.86
Litres	35,702.48
Pieces	2,310,131
Bottles	394,763

OPSON III - 33 countries	
<i>Unit of measurement</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Tonnes	5,661.40
Litres	739,816.00
Pieces	255,082
Livestock	300
Pre-packaged items	170,175

OPSON IV - 47 countries	
<i>Unit of measurement</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Tonnes	11,591.77
Litres	814,563.19
Pieces	1,233,911
Livestock	6, 172

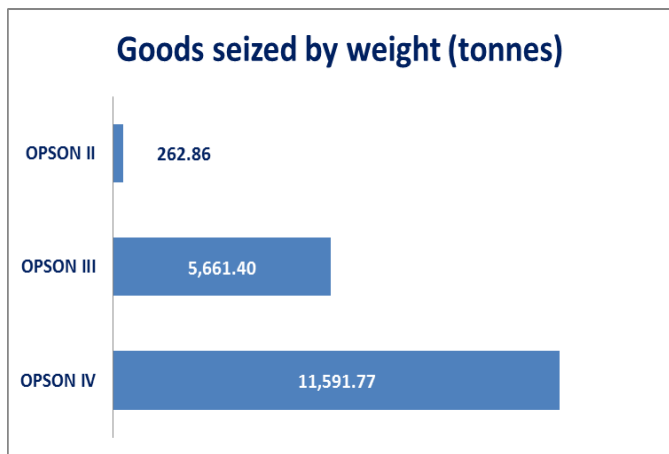


Chart 1

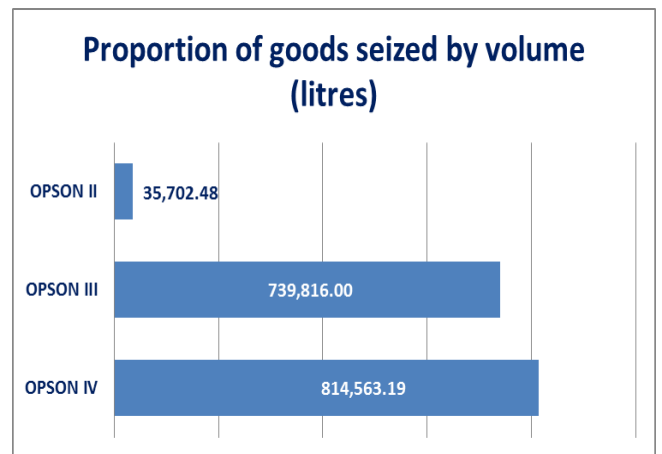


Chart 2

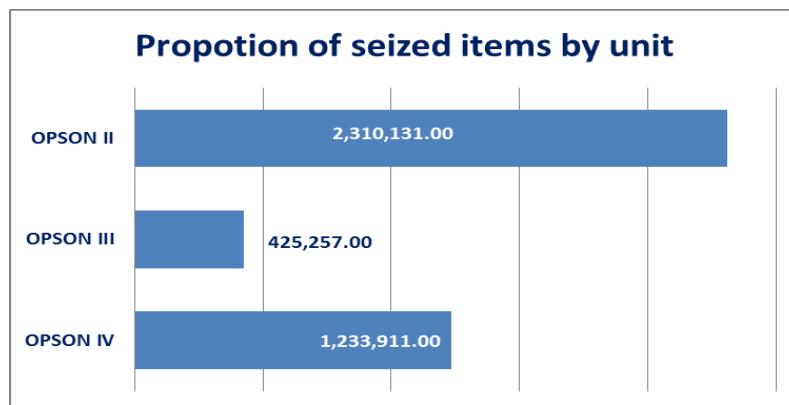


Chart 3

• **Infringements reported in OPSON IV – breakdown per regions**

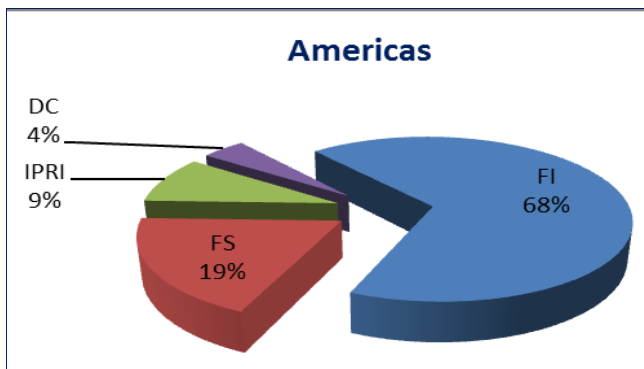


Chart 1

Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, USA

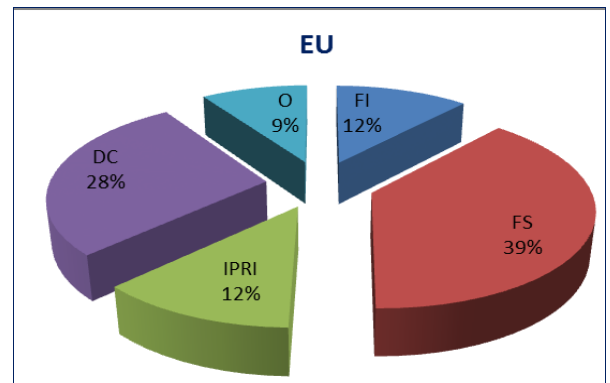


Chart 2

28 EU MS

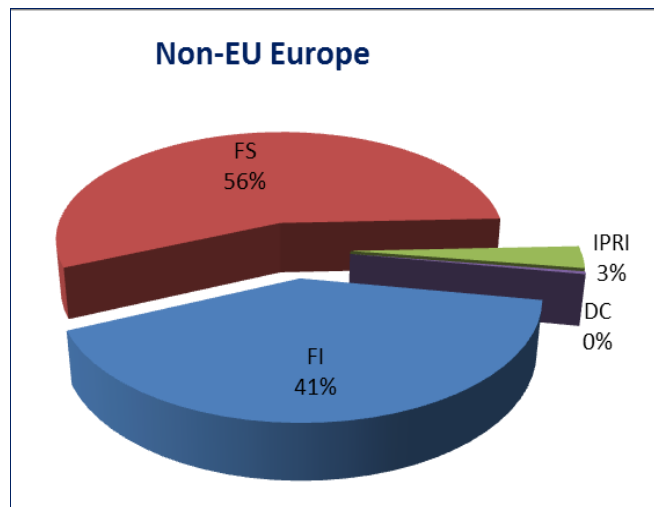


Chart 3

Belarus, Norway, Iceland, Turkey

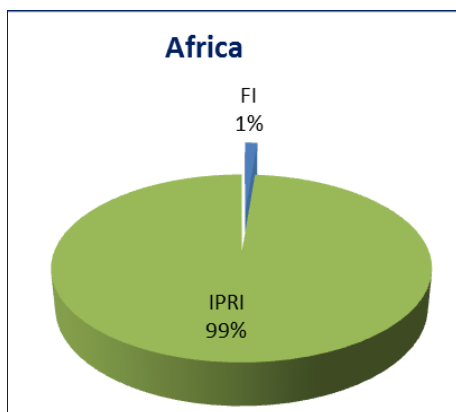


Chart 4

Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda

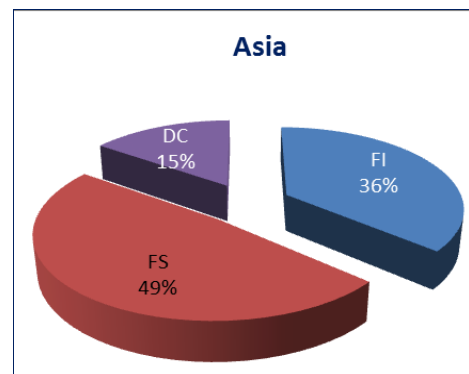


Chart 5

The Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam

In terms of infringements, all regions face different challenges. In Africa, the main issue regards counterfeit foodstuff and beverages. In Europe, food safety and fraudulent practices to deceive consumers are the main concern. The chart 'Americas' includes US results. However, removing US data, the proportion of fiscal infringement increases to almost 90%, which reveals that the main challenge for Latin America is smuggling.

Annex 4: Pictures library

The pictures below illustrate the main events developed during OPSON IV.



Launch Meeting OPSON IV, 3-4 June 2014 - Madrid, Spain



Training session, 8-9 October 2014 – IPSG, Lyon, France



Debriefing meeting, 9-10 April 2015 – Prague, Czech Republic

Annex 5: INTERPOL/Europol joint press release

Record seizures of fake food and drink in INTERPOL-Europol operation

16 February 2015

Thousands of tonnes of fake and sub-standard food and drink have been seized in 47 countries around the world as part of an INTERPOL-Europol coordinated operation.

Operation Opson IV, conducted during December 2014 and January 2015, resulted in the seizure of more than 2,500 tonnes of counterfeit and illicit food, including mozzarella, strawberries, eggs, cooking oil and dried fruit.

Involving police, customs, national food regulatory bodies and partners from the private sector, checks were carried out at shops, markets, airports, seaports and industrial estates. "This year again, the results from Opson clearly reflect the threat that food fraud represents, as it affects all types of products and all regions of the world. Cooperation at national and international level is indispensable to disrupt the criminal gangs involved in this business," said Chris Vansteenkiste, head of Europol's Focal Point Copy who coordinated the activities in Europe.

Italian officials seized 31 tonnes of seafood being sold as fresh but which had been frozen before being doused with a chemical substance containing citric acid, phosphate and hydrogen peroxide to make the catch appear freshly caught. In South Sudan, an unlicensed water bottling plant was shut down, and Egyptian authorities seized 35 tonnes of fake butter and dismantled a factory producing fake tea.

Of the nearly 275,000 litres of drinks recovered across all regions, counterfeit alcohol was among the most seized product, including in the UK, where a plant making fake brand-name vodka was raided. Officers discovered more than 20,000 empty bottles ready for filling, hundreds of empty five-litre antifreeze containers which had been used to make the counterfeit alcohol, as well as a reverse osmosis unit used to remove the chemical's colour and smell.

In Uganda, police seized bottles of fake whisky, and in Rwanda officers raided a shop selling fake beer where genuine bottles which had been previously collected were re-filled for sale with a locally brewed product.

"Fake and sub-standard food and drink pose a real threat to health and safety. People are at serious risk and in some cases dying because of the greed of criminals whose sole concern is to make money," said Michael Ellis, head of INTERPOL's Trafficking in Illicit Goods and Counterfeiting unit which coordinated activities between the world police body's participating countries across the globe. "Through this operation, thousands of tonnes of potentially hazardous food and drink have been taken out of circulation."

An illegal slaughterhouse was shut down in Hungary, where officials also seized cars which had been modified to incorporate hidden compartments to smuggle fake alcohol. An investigation is ongoing in Norway following the seizure of counterfeit water bottles. The US Food and Drugs Administration focused efforts on dietary supplements sent by mail with inspections at Los Angeles Airport resulting in the seizure of illicit substances.

Some 85 tonnes of meat illegally imported into Thailand without testing to ensure they complied with health and safety regulations were destroyed, and police also dismantled a criminal network producing fake whisky and seized nearly 20,000 litres of the counterfeit alcohol.

Authorities in Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay focused their efforts at border control points. In addition to attempting to evade paying duties, goods are often transported, packaged or stored in conditions which may pose health risks to consumers.

Operation Opson IV resulted in a number of arrests across the globe and investigations are continuing. Among the aims of the operation is to identify and disrupt the organized crime networks behind the trafficking in fake goods; enhance cooperation between the involved law enforcement and regulatory authorities; and to raise public awareness of the dangers posed by fake and sub-standard food and drink.

Countries which took part in Operation Opson IV: Austria, Belgium, Benin, Belarus, Botswana, Bulgaria, Burundi, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, South Korea, South Sudan, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Uruguay, United Kingdom, USA and Vietnam.

Source URL:

<https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/record-seizures-fake-food-and-drink-interpol-europol-operation>

Annex 6: Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronyms	
EU MS	European Union Member State
EMPACT	European Multi-disciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threat
IPR	Intellectual Property Right
LEA	Law Enforcement Agency
NCP	National Contact Point
OCG	Organised Criminal Group
Organisations and Institutions	
EU	European Union
EU COM	European Commission
DG SANTÉ	Directorate General Health & Consumers
IPSG	INTERPOL General Secretariat
INTERPOL TIGC	Trafficking in Illicit Goods and Counterfeiting Sub-directorate