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Operation White Sea III : Belgian Customs leads an international operation against drugs smuggling on sea

From June 12 to July 11 2023, the international operation White Sea III against drugs smuggling on sea took place.

The operational activities were situated along the Western European coast, in the seaports, on the Channel and the North Sea. There was an active participation of the Customs and Police services. The international operation was led by Belgian Customs as an action under the EMPACT Framework.

The operation focused on the following maritime smuggling methods: drop off at sea, transfer at sea to smaller vessels, smuggling by the crew, drugs attached to the hull of the ship or found via deck sweeps.

There is a clear trend of smuggling on board or below the vessels , in addition to most common smuggling in containers.

Patrol vessels, fast boats, boarding teams, rummage teams, divers, helicopters and coastguard aircraft from Spain, Portugal, France, Ireland, United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Poland were deployed with support of analysis units.

There was a close collaboration with Frontex, Europol and MAOC.

In preparation of the action, international training exercises were organized with participants of the agencies involved.

For Belgium, there was active participation from the Customs Investigation Services, the Customs Maritime Brigade, the Federal Judicial Police, the Maritime Police, the Navy, the Maritime Information Crossroads and the Public Prosecutor's Office of West Flanders.

During the operation, there were 8 seizures in Europe for in total 1.509 kg of cocaine and 12 arrests.

779 vessels were analysed and tracked. A total of 79 vessels were controlled.

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