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International Operation White Sea VI: Belgian Customs Coordinates Action Against Maritime Drug Trafficking

From 8 June to 5 July, the international operation White Sea VI was carried out to combat maritime drug trafficking. Belgian Customs coordinated the operation, which brought together customs and law enforcement authorities from 14 European countries, as well as the Belgian Federal Judicial Police, the Maritime Police, the Belgian Navy, the Maritime Information Centre and the Public Prosecutor's Office of West Flanders.

The operation confirms a clear trend already identified through Europol's analyses: large vessels are increasingly dropping cocaine shipments at sea, which are then collected by smaller boats.

Results of the operation

- 2 seizures in Europe
- 454 kg of cocaine seized
- 5 arrests
- 691 vessels analysed and monitored
- 117 vessels inspected

The operation focused on the European Atlantic coast, the English Channel, the North Sea and major seaports. Under the coordination of Belgian Customs, customs and police services from 14 European countries worked closely together.

The operation targeted several maritime smuggling methods, including:

- the dropping of drugs at sea ("drop-off" operations);
- transshipment to smaller vessels;
- smuggling involving crew members;
- drugs concealed on deck or attached to the hull of vessels.

Patrol vessels, high-speed boats, boarding teams, search teams, divers, helicopters and Coast Guard aircraft were deployed, with the support of dedicated analytical teams.

Participating countries were Spain, Portugal, France, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia and Poland.

The operation was conducted within the framework of Europol's EMPACT (European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats). International partners included Frontex, Europol, the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre (MAOC), the United States and liaison officers based in Latin America.

Operation White Sea VI once again demonstrates the importance of international cooperation and





intelligence-sharing in tackling increasingly sophisticated maritime trafficking networks.



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