

Question for written answer E-014228/2015
to the Commission
Rule 130
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Subject: EU support for Member States to fight the smuggling of tobacco products

The Hercule III programme was conceived to protect the EU's financial interests and thus to increase its economic competitiveness. Actions taken as part of this programme include providing technical and operational support to law enforcement agencies in Member States in order to combat cross-border criminal activity and providing professional training in combating fraud, corruption and other illegal activities.

Despite the very promising results of the Hercule programme under the last financial perspective, the losses to the budgets of Member States due to the illegal smuggling of tobacco products still amount to more than EUR 10 billion annually. However, the second annual work programme only assumes EUR 14.1 million for combating smuggling. This figure does not seem adequate.

The Hercule III programme will allocate more than EUR 70 million to fund X-ray scanners and other technical equipment for use in ports, airports and border crossings between 2014 and 2020. However, the cost of purchasing just one railway scanner amounts to several million euros. It is to be assumed, therefore, that these funds will not be sufficient to cover the needs of the countries involved.

In this connection, does the Commission foresee the possibility of increasing the amount of funds earmarked for the Hercule III programme? What other actions does the Commission plan to take with a view to supporting Member States in the fight against the illegal trade in tobacco products?