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## Tiger trafficking in EU linked to captive breeding facilities and transnational organized crime networks

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Europe-based criminal networks exploit weak regulation and government oversight to traffic illegal tiger parts, facilitated by transnational criminal organizations as well as tiger breeding facilities, middlemen processors, and distributors embedded in Vietnamese diaspora communities in Europe.

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Current specific critical trends related to tiger trafficking in Europe include:

1. CONTEXT: Within Europe, the legal captive tiger industry supplies the illicit trade in tiger parts both for domestic and export markets, primarily within Asian communities. Across the EU, a general lack of oversight and monitoring of captive tiger holding facilities, weaknesses in legislation, and lack of enforcement of relevant regulations facilitates the trade. At least 1600 tigers are held captive in Europe, including in zoos, circuses, and private facilities, according to NGO reporting. The illegal trade in tigers and their parts and derivatives is a key threat to their survival in the wild. Tiger products are sought after for medicine, health tonics, or decoration, and as a symbol of wealth and status, particularly in Asian countries. Within Europe 94% of tiger products seized are medicinal derivatives in the form of patches, pills, or bottles. Other products in the trade include live tigers, skins, claws, and teeth.



*Traffickers kill captive tigers and remove and boil their bones for products including tiger bullion, tiger glue or cake, and other liquified tiger products sold under the name “cao hổ, Vietnamese for ‘tiger concentrate.’*

*(image: Czech Environmental Inspectorate)*

2. **CONVERGENCE:** Networks trafficking in tiger derivatives have also been linked to illegal trade in ivory, rhino horn, powder and broth containing extract of primate species, as well as drug trafficking, counterfeiting, fraud and corruption, according to law enforcement sources.
3. **ORGANIZED CRIME:** In 2018, Czech authorities disclosed evidence of Vietnamese trafficking rings operating through breeding facilities to process and sell tiger products within Europe and in Asia. According to Czech authorities all of the tiger seizures within the country have been associated with the Vietnamese community since 2013. Poland, Germany, and Italy have also reported criminal activity within Asian diaspora communities involved in the tiger trade. Traffickers purchase tigers from across the EU, easily moving the animals between holding and processing facilities in the absence of permitting requirements.
4. **LOOPHOLES:** Loopholes in legislation mean tigers bred in captivity receive less protections than wild tigers and can be imported, exported and re-exported for commercial use. Within the EU, tigers can be traded across member states without any permits, and in most countries private entities can own tigers. Regulatory challenges include lack of data including species, offspring, markings, sales and exports, information on criminal offences committed by businesses or individuals, and weak oversight or information on deaths and disposal of deceased animals.
5. **SMUGGLING TO ASIA:** Traffickers smuggle processed tiger products via air transport from points across Europe to Asia, hidden in passenger luggage and in shipments of household goods. Common obfuscation techniques include carrying tiger liquids in non-original packaging such as water bottles and cosmetic jars. According to Czech authorities, smugglers quickly adapt obfuscation tactics in response to seizures, indicating some level of communication and organization among traffickers. For example, during the course of a weeks-long operation in the Czech Republic traffickers initially packed suitcases in a plastic wrap, then later in rope, and finally locked bags with chains in an effort to prevent inspection.
6. **LIVE ANIMAL TRAFFICKING:** Live breeding facilities, cub petting businesses, zoos, and circuses likely supply the illegal trade in live and dead animals wittingly and unwittingly. Breeding facilities and live animal traders take advantage of lax inspections to transfer tigers throughout the EU and to export them to countries implicated in the illegal tiger trade. Thailand and Vietnam imported the highest number of live tigers from the EU from 2013-2017, possibly for tiger product processing. Live tiger trafficking also occurs within Europe, as evidenced by the 2019 seizure of ten live tigers at the Poland-Belarus border, trafficked from a circus family in Italy to a fake zoo in Russia, and the disappearance of a large number of tigers used to supply cub petting businesses. Abattoirs, animal disposal companies, and taxidermists have also been implicated in the illegal processing and sale of protected species parts.
7. **HIGH PRICES:** All tiger parts achieve high values in Europe including: live tigers €22,000; tiger bones €1,700/kg; €2,300-4,000 tiger skins; claws €100 each; tiger bullion €60/gram. As much as 10kg of tiger bullion can be produced from one tiger.

| RED FLAGS                     |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>Clients (corporate):</i>   | <i>Unusual transaction activity between animal holding facilities in Europe and Asian clients in Europe and within Asia. Individuals and entities with past involvement in IWT.</i>  |
| <i>High Risk Clients:</i>     | <i>Entities involved in keeping captive live tigers including circuses, private zoos, breeders, cub petting businesses, and animal entertainment businesses; Wild animal disposal services, abattoirs, and taxidermists.</i>                                   |
| <i>High Risk Transactions</i> | <i>Any transaction involving tigers or tiger parts for export to animal import companies, zoos, circuses, or breeding facilities in countries at high risks of involvement in tiger trafficking including Vietnam, Thailand, and China.</i>                    |
| <i>High Risk Geographies:</i> | <i>EU countries with high numbers of captive bred tigers and illegal or suspect transactions include the Czech Republic, Spain, Slovakia, Italy, and Germany. Asian countries involved in illicit tiger transactions include Vietnam, Thailand, and China.</i> |
| <i>Obfuscation techniques</i> | <i>Liquids in non-original packaging, personal luggage wrapped in plastic, ropes or with chain locks on high risks routes; speakers and other electronic equipment</i>   |
| <i>Keywords:</i>              | <i>“cao hổ,” “tiger concentrate”</i>   |

Further reading:

**Gruesome discovery of Czech tiger farm exposes illegal trade in heart of Europe**, The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/nov/19/gruesome-discovery-of-czech-tiger-farm-exposes-illegal-trade-in-heart-of-europe>

**Europe's 'Tiger Kings': New report highlights scale of captive tigers in the EU**, Euronews

<https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/21/europe-s-tiger-kings-new-report-highlights-scale-of-captive-tigers-in-the-eu>

**The Tiger Kings in Europe**, Four Paws

<https://www.four-paws.org/our-stories/press-releases/the-tiger-kings-in-europe>

**Europe's second class tigers, Revealing the out-of-control captive tiger numbers and commercial trade**, Four Paws

[https://media.4-paws.org/c/5/5/5/c555a6c3b7150e4bbcb672872796b28b7b2598d6/Report\\_Europes-second-class-tigers\\_EN\\_FP-2020.pdf](https://media.4-paws.org/c/5/5/5/c555a6c3b7150e4bbcb672872796b28b7b2598d6/Report_Europes-second-class-tigers_EN_FP-2020.pdf)

**Falling through the system: the role of the European Union captive tiger population in the trade in tigers**, TRAFFIC

<https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/13230/falling-through-the-system.pdf>

**Illegal tiger trade in the Czech Republic SC70 Inf. 24**, CITES

<https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/70/Inf/E-SC70-Inf-24.pdf>

**Mistreated tigers rescued from truck heading to Russia recovering in Poland**, Poland In

<https://polandin.com/45176583/mistreated-tigers-rescued-from-truck-heading-to-russia-recovering-in-poland>

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END

**SOURCE:** This advisory is based on UfW Transport Taskforce analysis of recent enforcement actions as well as open source and confidential reporting from partners. We have *high* confidence in the reliability and validity of this information, with the following caveat: the data upon which this analysis is based is exclusively anecdotal and is therefore inherently limited to available information and likely incomplete.

**PRIORITIES:** This alert is related to the following Transport Taskforce information sharing priorities (checked):

- Wildlife trafficker networks, behaviour, intentions, and operational tactics and strategy
- Indicators of suspicious or higher risk activity ('red flags') related to wildlife trafficking
- Data potentially reportable to or shareable with law enforcement
- Security/physical risks and vulnerabilities to transport company operations, facilities, or staff
- Unintentional facilitation of illegal wildlife demand or retail trade

**ACTIONS:** This alert is assessed as most relevant to the general categories of action checked below. **\*\*All decisions and actions informed by this alert are the sole responsibility of the receiving organization\*\***

- Conduct reasonable checks on shipments or clients fitting a similar profile
- Execute / enhance internal controls or procedures relevant to this information
- Report / share information to customs / law enforcement
- Information has potential security implications for company employees


**About**  
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**Contact**  
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