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Russian Customs Authorities Seize $153M Worth of Cocaine Hidden in Banana Shipment

By AFP

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Russian customs authorities said Wednesday that they seized 820 kilograms (1,800 pounds) of cocaine hidden under a shipment of bananas, calling it their largest bust of drugs from Latin America this year.

The haul, valued at more than 12 billion rubles ($153 million), was uncovered in banana containers with the help of the FSB security service, according to the Federal Customs Service. The cocaine was packed in briquettes marked with the logo of a French luxury fashion brand and concealed in a "hidden cavity" under the fruit.

Authorities said the bust followed a tip-off from "foreign colleagues" about a South American trafficking group attempting to establish a new smuggling route into Russia.

Investigators said they launched a criminal probe into large-scale drug trafficking, a charge that carries a maximum sentence of life in prison. Russia enforces strict anti-drug laws and regularly hands down harsh penalties for narcotics offenses.

Cocaine smuggling into Russia has surged over the past two years, according to the pro-Kremlin newspaper Izvestia.

International traffickers are increasingly turning to Russia as a transit hub, Izvestia reported, in part because the Ukrainian port of Odesa has become inaccessible due to the ongoing war in Ukraine.

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