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St. Petersburg Customs Authorities Seize Record Cocaine Shipment Hidden in Banana Cargo

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@customs_rf

Russian customs and law enforcement authorities said Friday they had seized more than 1.5 metric tons of cocaine concealed in a shipment of bananas from Ecuador, calling it the country's largest-ever drug bust.

The Federal Customs Service and the FSB security service said the haul, valued at more than 20 billion rubles ($240 million), was discovered at a shipping port in St. Petersburg on Aug. 29 after a tip from unidentified "foreign partners." Officials said 1,500 bricks of cocaine were hidden in 63 boxes of bananas aboard the ship Cool Emerald.

A video released by the FSB showed boxes labeled "Twins," "Premium Bananas" and "Product of Ecuador" stacked inside and outside a container. The cocaine's net weight was

1,515 kilograms, the agencies said.

A fruit shipping industry source in St. Petersburg, speaking on condition of anonymity, told The Moscow Times that drug seizures at the city's ports were common but that the scale of the seizure likely explains why the case drew attention.

"I've had my shipments seized no less than twice a month, sometimes more," the source said. "And that's just with one company. There are at least dozens of them in Russia."

Authorities did not clarify whether Ecuador was the shipment's origin or a transit hub. A criminal investigation into large-scale smuggling was opened, and officials said efforts were underway to find those involved in the drug trafficking network.

Russia has emerged as a growing transit route for Latin American cocaine headed to Europe since Ukraine's Odesa port, once a major hub, closed after Russia's 2022 invasion.

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