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 ***News Release***

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|  | For the attention of **News Desks**  | No. of pages: **2** |  |
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**Grape plot squashed as tobacco smuggler jailed**

A lorry driver has been jailed for four years and eight months after smuggling eight million cigarettes into the UK disguised as grapes.

Miklos Sokorai, 48, of Ukraine, tried to smuggle the cigarettes worth £2,500,229 unpaid duty into the UK through the Port of Dover, a HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) investigation found.

Border Force officers in Dover stopped Sokorai on 16 May 2019 after arriving from Calais. His paperwork stated there were 4,160 cartons of grapes inside the refrigerated trailer. When officers searched the trailer, they found two pallets of grapes and the rest were filled with the cigarettes.

Sokorai was arrested, the cigarettes were seized and the matter was referred to HMRC to investigate.

Tom Hunnisett Assistant Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

“HMRC and partner agencies will not stop in our bid to prevent the streets of the UK being flooded with illegal cigarettes. The amount of duty evaded on these goods was equivalent to the starting salaries of 99 newly qualified police officers in Kent.

“Anyone with information about suspected tax fraud to report it to HMRC [online](https://www.gov.uk/report-tobacco-or-alcohol-tax-evasion), or call our Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.”

Sokorai pleaded not guilty to Excise Duty fraud on 18 May 2019. He was found guilty after a trial at Maidstone Crown Court on 25 October 2019 and sentenced to 56 months in jail .

**Notes for editors**

1. Miklos Sokorai (DOB 14/11/1970), a Hungarian national, now of Ukraine, pleaded not guilty to Excise Duty fraud on 18 May 2019. He was found guilty after trial at Maidstone Crown Court on 25 October 2019 and was sentenced to 56 months in jail.
2. In total, 5.2 million Richmond cigarettes, 1.5 million Mayfair cigarettes and 1.4 million Lambert & Butler cigarettes were seized from the trailer.
3. Anyone with information about people or businesses involved in tax fraud can report it online [here](https://www.gov.uk/report-an-unregistered-trader-or-business) or call our Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.
4. Kent police officers receive a starting salary of £25,082. [Source.](https://www.kent.police.uk/police-forces/kent-police/areas/kent-police/c/careers/police-officers/police-constable/)
5. Follow HMRC’s press office on Twitter [@HMRCpressoffice](https://twitter.com/HMRCpressoffice).

**Issued by HM Revenue & Customs Press Office**

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