



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEALERS IN ANCIENT ART

What really happened with Operation Pandora?

IADAA investigates

Operation Pandora – a major initiative by 18 countries* to clamp down on the illicit trade in cultural property within Europe – took place in October and November 2016, with a joint action week from November 17 to 23.

The media campaign that followed highlighted the seizure of thousands of objects, as well as the arrests of 75 people. However, despite a catalogue of statistics released by Europol, which coordinated the effort, there is little to show how effective the operation actually was, especially in looking for material looted from the current war zones, its primary focus.

Frustrated by the lack of clarity, the International Association of Dealers in Ancient Art (IADAA) launched its own investigation to find out. Here is a summary of the findings.

- **None of the 3,500-4,000 items seized came from a current war zone**
- **None of the seized items shown is of great importance, despite claims to the contrary**
- **Much of what was seized was of minimal or no value, and a significant proportion did not comprise cultural objects or works of art**
- **Although promoted as a European-wide initiative, over 80% of the people searched and over 85% of the arrests made were in Bulgaria.**
- **There were only 10 arrests across the 17 countries outside Bulgaria that took part in Operation Pandora.**

IADAA has not seen any evidence at all of artefacts of great importance and value, nor any evidence of looted or illegally exported artefacts from the Middle East, especially from Iraq or Syria.

If Operation Pandora has been as effective as Europol and its fellow authorities appear to have claimed in media reports, then what it has shown is the distinct absence of looted material in Europe from Syria and Iraq.

IADAA chairman Vincent Geerling said: “From the additional information now revealed, what this operation actually shows is the reverse of what is being promoted. Far from Europe being flooded with looted artefacts from war zones, it clearly demonstrates how little there is.

“Despite this, the European Union is even now conducting an extensive consultation exercise into restricting the movement of cultural objects further, when what the authorities need to be doing is focusing their efforts and resources on supporting source nations protect sensitive archaeological sites that are under serious threat from looters.”

* The following EU Member States participated in Operation Pandora: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom. Non-EU countries involved: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Switzerland.

Attached is a more detailed analysis of IADAA's findings

Operation Pandora official photographs



Poland



Greece

Operation Pandora official photographs



Spain



Internet?