

Hercule III programme: New funds available for the fight against fraud in the European Union

This year, the European Commission will make available EUR 14.1 million under the Hercule III anti-fraud programme to support Member States in fighting fraud, corruption and other illegal activities. This is an increase in the allocated funds compared to previous years, as foreseen in the second annual work programme for Hercule III. The programme helps finance concrete projects such as the purchase by national authorities of x-ray scanners and other technical equipment to stamp out criminal activities against the EU's financial interests, such as for example smuggling of goods.

"The Hercule programme is a proven tool to support Member States in their efforts to fight illegal activities against the EU budget. This year once again it will help financing concrete, tangible, projects which aim to ensure that fraudsters are caught and that taxpayers' money is protected," the Director-General of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), Giovanni Kessler, said.

As set out in the Commission decision adopted today, the budget available for the programme has been increased from EUR 13.7 million in 2014 to EUR 14.1 million in 2015. The most important changes in the 2015 Work Programme relate to a substantial increase in the funding for digital forensics training. In addition, the Work Programme includes a planned study that will address the lack of a uniform approach to sanctions on cigarette smuggling in the EU Member States and its impact on the illicit trade in cigarettes and counterfeit goods in general. More money has also become available for awarding grants to the Member States' national and regional authorities for the purchase of specialised technical equipment. This increase follows the massive interest shown in 2014 for Hercule Technical Assistance grants.

In June 2015, the European Commission will publish notices for "Calls for Proposals" to invite customs, tax authorities, universities and legal experts in the Member States to present projects that help achieving the objective of protecting the EU budget by fighting fraud, corruption and related irregularities.

Background:

Further information for applicants is available on the website of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) who is managing the Hercule III programme on behalf of the European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud/policy/hercule/index_en.htm

Hercule III is a financial programme specifically dedicated to fighting fraud, corruption and any other illegal activities affecting the financial interests of the EU. It provides for the collective procurement of specialised equipment and databases to be used by national law enforcement agencies and training for anti-fraud specialists. The programme covers the period 2014-2020 and will provide a total of EUR 104.9 million of support to Member States.

There are two major improvements in Hercule III:

First, the support for grants is increased substantially. Hercule III now allows for grants to cover up to 80% of the costs of an action undertaken by a national or regional administration. It allows potential beneficiaries to submit an application even in cases where there can only be little national co-funding. This is particularly important in the current financial and economic situation, where many national budgets are severely constrained.

Second, the reporting on the implementation of the Programme will be improved. The annual report to the European Parliament and to the Council will include an assessment of the achievement of the programme's objectives. In order to enhance the Programme's transparency, the Commission will clearly set out how the Programme contributes to protecting taxpayers' money.

OLAF

The mission of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) is threefold: it protects the financial interests of the European Union by investigating fraud, corruption and any other illegal activities; it detects and investigates serious matters relating to the discharge of professional duties by members and staff of the EU institutions and bodies that could result in disciplinary or criminal proceedings; and it supports the EU institutions, in particular the European Commission, in the development and implementation of anti-fraud legislation and policies.

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