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Operational aspects of fighting fraud in the area of EU structural funds

On 13-14 October, over 100 anti-fraud experts from across Europe met in Rome to discuss the operational aspects of fighting fraud with EU funds. The seminar, organised by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), received the support of the Italian Presidency of the Council of the EU and of the Italian Guardia di Finanza.

In his opening remarks, Giovanni Kessler, Director-General of OLAF, noted that *"the protection of the EU budget is a common responsibility for all the colleagues meeting today – be they EU or national authorities. We share a common objective of seeking to better detect, investigate and prosecute fraud involving EU funds. Through a hands-on approach in the various working groups planned, we will discuss how to improve our common efforts in tackling cross-border fraud cases. It is only through practical cooperation that we will be able to counter fraud efficiently and to protect EU taxpayers' interests."*

The main working sessions of the seminar focused on: identifying common challenges in fraud prevention and investigation; embedding effective and proportionate anti-fraud measures in the EU cohesion policy; fostering pro-active cooperation between Member States' authorities and OLAF. Among other issues, participants analysed the involvement of organised crime in fraud and corruption cases involving EU funds. Anti-fraud practitioners also emphasised the important role that national anti-fraud coordination services (AFCOS) have in working with OLAF on fraud cases affecting the financial interests of the EU.

In their closing remarks, the Italian authorities – represented by Mr Gozi, the Under-Secretary of State responsible for European Affairs and Policies and Mr Cantone, President of the National Anti-Corruption Authority – underlined the importance of giving adequate protection to the EU budget. They reiterated the will of the national authorities to cooperate with OLAF and with other European partners in fighting fraud and corruption.

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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