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## Senior customs officials discuss next steps in combating customs fraud

On 14-15 November 2019, senior customs officials from around the European Union met in Helsinki to discuss current trends and appropriate responses to customs fraud, during a High-Level Conference organised by the Finnish Customs together with the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). Entitled "*Strategies to fight customs fraud in a globalised trading landscape*," the event brought together national customs officials as well as representatives of the Commission/OLAF, Europol, Frontex and EUIPO. Discussions focused on how best to prevent, investigate and detect customs fraud when faced with a growing volume of consignments, especially as a result of the boom in e-commerce.

Hannu Mäkinen, Director-General of Finnish Customs said: "*To be successful in countering cross-border customs fraud, we need to step up good multidisciplinary cooperation between all relevant actors.*"

"*Customs fraud costs European taxpayers a lot of money,*" OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä said. "*We need to identify practical ways forwards to help customs services better fight fraud, so we can truly bring the Customs Union to the next level,*" he added.

Customs fraud can take a variety of forms such as undervaluation, where fraudsters declare lower value for a good upon import, misdeclaration of goods to benefit from less tariffs, or smuggling. The challenge of the customs community today, in an environment of substantially growing trade volumes, is to maintain and improve the speed and service delivery of customs formalities while maintaining systematic and effective controls.

### **OLAF mission, mandate and competences:**

OLAF's mission is to detect, investigate and stop fraud with EU funds.

OLAF fulfils its mission by:

- carrying out independent investigations into fraud and corruption involving EU funds, so as to ensure that all EU taxpayers' money reaches projects that can create jobs and growth in Europe;
- contributing to strengthening citizens' trust in the EU Institutions by investigating serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU Institutions;
- developing a sound EU anti-fraud policy.

In its independent investigative function, OLAF can investigate matters relating to fraud, corruption and other offences affecting the EU financial interests concerning:

- all EU expenditure: the main spending categories are Structural Funds, agricultural policy and rural development funds, direct expenditure and external aid;
- some areas of EU revenue, mainly customs duties;
- suspicions of serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU institutions.

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