



EUROPEAN ANTI-FRAUD OFFICE

PRESS RELEASE No 08/2019

Skopje, 19/09/2019

OLAF Director-General urges strong action on fraud prevention

The challenges and opportunities of fraud prevention topped the agenda of this year's Annual Conference of Anti-Fraud Coordination Services of EU candidate and potential candidate countries, which took place in North Macedonia on 18-20 September. Organised by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) with the help of the Ministry of Finance of North Macedonia, the event gathered participants from law enforcement bodies but also from the civil service, and focused on translating operational knowledge into efficient fraud prevention measures.

Anti-Fraud Coordination Services (AFCOS) facilitate the effective cooperation and exchange of information with OLAF. They take an active role in the implementation of comprehensive anti-fraud strategies at national level, sharing information on possible irregularities in relation to the management of the EU funds and effectively safeguarding the EU budget.

With the overall amount of pre-accession funding for 2014-2020 amounting to almost EUR 12 billion, the positive cooperation with candidate countries and potential candidates became a recurring theme of the seminar. This event, which welcomed seven EU candidate and potential candidate countries, as well as representatives from three EU Member States as well as from Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, was an excellent opportunity for the participants to benefit from the discussions and the experiences shared.

"I believe the fight against fraud and corruption should become a central element of government action, including giving law enforcement and public administration the tools they need to detect and to prosecute fraudsters," OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä said. *"It is our joint responsibility to ensure that EU money is spent correctly and soundly, and does not end up in the pockets of fraudsters,"* he added.

"Prevention is a crucial area in the fight against fraud and it should be treated as a priority by managing, certifying and audit authorities" Minister of Finance of Republic of North Macedonia said. *"It is easier and more cost-effective to prevent fraud than to make repairs upon the occurrence of fraud. A robust and effectively implemented management and control system is essential as it can sufficiently reduce the risk of fraud"* she added.

OLAF will maintain a strong role in conducting investigations in EU candidate countries even after the European Public Prosecutor's Office becomes operational in 2020. One of the pre-

accession requirements, therefore, implies developing a solid track record of cooperation on OLAF investigations and on reporting irregularities discovered by the countries themselves. Minister Angelovska said there is an ongoing process in North Macedonia of establishing an AFCOS to combat irregularities and fraud.

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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