

Minutes of the 31st meeting of the OLAF Anti-Fraud Communicators' Network (OAFCN), 26 January 2022, Brussels

1. Opening of meeting and welcome address

OLAF Spokesperson Jana Cappello (JC) opened the 31st meeting of OAFCN by welcoming the 87 participants. While regretting that the meeting was being held virtually because of the Covid pandemic, JC hoped that there could be an in person OAFCN meeting in the autumn of this year. JC highlighted the recent structural changes which took place at OLAF, including the creation of a unit (O3) dealing with operational coordination with the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and of a monitoring and reporting unit (C4).

In a subsequent opening address, OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä (VI) welcomed the strong digital turnout to this meeting. He echoed the new European Parliament President Roberta Metsola when she said that the European institutions 'would need to be at their strongest to provide leadership and direction' saying that those in the anti-fraud network would have to be at their best to protect the EU budget and citizens. VI referred to OLAF's role in protecting the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). He also talked about the new anti-fraud architecture and the positive working relationship that had developed between OLAF and the European Public Prosecutor's Office. VI ended by wishing participants an inspiring and fruitful conference and said that those attending the meeting were key to communicating the vital role that the European Anti-fraud Network plays in keeping safe citizens' money as well as society.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The Agenda for this year's meeting was adopted unanimously without amendment. The minutes of the 30th OAFCN meeting (10 February 2021) were approved unanimously without amendment.

3. Nature of meeting

The meeting was non-public.

4. Topics discussed

Working session 1: Anti-Fraud communication in 2021 - Fighting fraud, an update from the EU anti-fraud community

OLAF Communication in 2021

Ms Cappello (JC) gave an overview of some of the internal personnel changes which took place in OLAF in 2021, including the fact that Ms Eirini Nikolaidou is the new Deputy Spokesperson and Head of the Communication Sector.

JC reflected on OLAF's activities in 2021, including the publication of the OLAF Report 2020, which covered OLAF activities during the first year of the pandemic. As a result, the report largely focussed on the work that OLAF played in keeping the public safe and healthy. JC highlighted some of the actions that OLAF took to target counterfeit and dangerous Covid-related materials, such as fake protective equipment, sub-standard test kits, and potentially fake treatments for the virus. The report was presented during a virtual press conference, which drew considerable media attention to OLAF's actions. This media interest continued throughout 2021 especially when it emerged that OLAF had helped prevent fake vaccines from entering the market place.

Ms NIKOLAIDOU (EN) listed some of OLAF's communication activities since the last meeting of the OAFCN. This included the change of OLAF's twitter handle to @EUAntiFraud and the creation of a dedicated OLAF LinkedIn page. EN noted that OLAF's social media impressions had doubled since last year and encouraged those present to keep liking and sharing OLAF's posts.

Ms Réka Görömbey (RG), OLAF Webmaster, gave an overview of the new look of the [OLAF website](#), after it was migrated to a new platform. RG highlighted some of the new features such as the filter in the [News](#) section whereby one can find press releases from the OAFCN members.

HERCULE and Union Anti-Fraud Program update

Ms Sorina Emilia Buksa (SEB), Head of Sector for the HERCULE programme in OLAF, presented an update on the Hercule III Programme (2014-2021) which was administered by OLAF, and gave an update of the Union Anti-Fraud Programme (2021-2027).

SEB listed some of the outcomes of the Hercule III programme including: over 10 000 participants taking part in specialised training and conferences (between 2014-2020) which achieved 93% participant stratification rate; law enforcement training for 1340 officials from member states; 45 high-level events on protecting EU finances; and the award of 285 grants largely for law enforcement authorities in Member States to strengthen investigation activities into attacks on the EU's financial interests.

SEB highlighted the key outcomes of the Hercule III programme saying that respondents found it to be highly relevant and effective. The main beneficiaries of the programme were national and regional authorities, research and educational institutes and non-profit enterprises. SEB listed some of the positive outcomes of Hercule III including that it provided additional value to EU, increased efficiency and facilitated cooperation between Member States and EU.

SEB also outlined the key objectives of the Union Anti-Fraud Programme 2021-2027 (UAFP). The objectives will be supported by 3 separate revenue streams totalling €181,207,000 which will seek to prevent and combat fraud, support reporting of irregularities and provide tools for information exchange and support for operational activities.

The EPPO – short introduction and communication update

Ms Lidija Globokar (LG), EPPO Press Officer, gave an overview of the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and their communication activities since the beginning of the EPPO's

operations (1 June 2021). LG talked in detail about the responsibilities of the communications team, which include websites, social media and media relations.

LG listed some of the milestones of the communication team, currently numbering four. Those milestones include: a functioning website, social media presence, the facilitation of almost 100 media interviews in the last two weeks of May 2021 and a successful launch event on 1 June 2021. LG also recognised the challenges of operating as a communications team during the pandemic. Moreover, LG briefly talked about the planned expansion of EPPO, including the addition of extra staff, publication of annual report in the spring and the development of an intranet.

Digital publishing and reporting: a Eurojust experiment with our Annual Report 2020

Ms Eszter Karoliny (EK), Head of EUROJUST's Corporate Communications Unit ad interim, introduced EUROJUST's experience in publishing its 2020 Annual Report in digital form. EK shared with the meeting some features contained in the digital report, such as interactive maps and the inclusion of videos.

EK said that the digital format proved to be successful and people rated it highly. It was found to be user-friendly and engaging for readers although it was noted that integrating the information onto the website took a great deal of time and effort. However, it was overall a positive experience and the decision was taken to create a similar digital report for 2022.

Operation Sentinel: Protecting the EU COVID-19 recovery funds

Mr Jan Op Gen Oorth, EUROPOL Spokesman, gave a brief overview of some of the recent actions of EUROPOL, including a Franco-Israeli operation which targeted fraud of Covid-related funding and which resulted in the arrest of eight suspects and the recovery of over 7.5 million euros. He also gave an overview of the new fraudulent trends which have emerged as a result of the Covid pandemic and of the actions that Europol has taken to tackle them.

He presented 'Operation Sentinel', which is specifically aimed at protecting the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) from fraudulent activity. 'Operation Sentinel' is coordinated by Europol and includes participation from OLAF, Eurojust, the EPPO and 19 Member States.

Working session 2: Communicating about protecting EU's Recovery

Exploring the role of OLAF and the Member States

Mr Olivier Salles, Adviser for OLAF's Knowledge Centre and member of the OLAF RRF Squad, focussed his presentation on the role that OLAF is playing in protecting the Recovery Resilience Facility (RRF).

The different phases of OLAF's involvement in the RRF were detailed:

First phase: Early definition of the legal framework. OLAF contributed to make sure there would be sufficient anti-fraud provisions in the RRF Regulation.

Second phase: The screening of the national plans. Each Member State had to provide to EU institutions RRF plans structured by targets and milestones, including some reporting and control mechanisms embedded. OLAF has been actively involved in screening those plans and contributed by making comments and changes to national plans.

Third phase: Exchange of information: OLAF played an active role in developing and participating in 'Operation Sentinel', which is an important part of sharing information on fraud-related issues with partners. OLAF was in regular contact with Member State to help support and protect their national plans, via technical anti-fraud meetings with AFCOS or through more bilateral discussions with national authorities. During these meetings, the RRF was always on the agenda and will continue to be so in the future. During this period, OLAF reached out to different actors, sharing best practices, and seeing what could be improved.

Implementation Phase: Now that the several RRF plans are being implemented and the funds start flowing in MS, OLAF will undertake its regular, anti-fraud work according to its existing mandate and tools.

European Commission's Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard

Mr Lorenzo Rosati (LR), Press and Media Officer in DG ECFIN, gave a presentation on the recently launched Resilience and Recovery Scoreboard. He explained that the Scoreboard delivers on the key commitment to display transparently information on the implementation of the RRF, thereby allowing the European Parliament and EU citizens' access to the progress, milestones and implementation of national plans.

LR pointed out that as the Scoreboard was launched in mid-December 2021 there is not much information at present, but more will be added in the future.

LR gave a virtual tour of the scoreboard website highlighting key elements such as:

- Homepage: key information about the tool itself
- Interactive maps, which states the allocation of funds by country
- Each national plan that the European Commission received
- The list of targets for each Member State and progress towards meeting them
- General information section

LR pointed out that (at time of speaking) 22 plans have been approved and that the Scoreboard would be the way that people could see how well Member States were doing in meeting their targets. This could be easily found out by using the country filter, which is available on the website.

Anti-Fraud Communication Activities of the Slovak Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP)

Ms Barbora Belovická (BB), Head of the Communication Department, and Mr Ján Králik (JK), Senior Legal Advisor, made a joint presentation on behalf of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic, focusing on communication activities related to the Slovak RRP.

BB noted that the Slovak Recovery Plan was not well known by the public. It was also viewed with scepticism and suffered from claims that it lacked transparency. The challenge was to promote a clear and positive message surrounding the plan, highlighting the good it would do for Slovakia, promoting the transparency safeguards contained within the framework, whilst also ensuring the visibility of Union funding and support under the Facility.

In order to achieve these goals it was decided to create two campaign strategies: one targeted at internal stakeholders and ministries, and the other for the general public and media. The strategies used a number of different channels and formats. These included websites, social media, training/workshops and targeted campaigns.

JK talked about some of the tools and measures which were developed to promote the message including:

- Fraud reporting form to aid transparency allowing anonymous reporting without the risk of retaliation.
- A monitoring tool, aimed at informing the public about milestones and targets in relation to the request. This tool determines when a milestone is achieved and what the status of risks is.

He also explained how increased administration capacity was critical to fraud detection and can enhance the protection of whistle-blowers.

BB emphasised the importance of employing an ‘umbrella narrative’ to help spread the anti-fraud message. That included using optimistic and plain language, which is easily understood.

Building Anti-Fraud Crowd Immunity

Ms Lelde Grīnvalde (LG), Deputy Director of the Communication Department at the Latvian Ministry of Finance, related last year’s communication experience of building an Anti-Fraud Crowd Immunity in Latvia. LG highlighted their experiences in November 2021 in hosting an Online Conference, which took place over two days, with the aim of raising public awareness of anti-fraud activities and strengthening cooperation in fighting fraud. The conference comprised 25 speakers from OLAF, EPPO, European Parliament, European Commission, NGOs, and different countries, and attracted positive media coverage. Over 1000 people attended.

The first day of conference focussed on fraud risks, red flags, different ways to deter possible fraud, Covid challenges, and technology as a tool to detect potential fraud. The second day looked at avoiding conflicts of interest and ended with a session on ethical and psychological aspects of crowd immunity.

The conclusions drawn from the conference were positive. Technological solutions have been developed during the pandemic, which makes it possible to better detect fraud but also creates new ways for fraudsters. New creative ways are therefore needed to detect these new types of fraud. It was concluded that whilst 70% immunity is important against the pandemic, it is also equally important to be immune against fraud.

Project CATONE – the Italian experience in the fight against frauds

Mr Arturo Iadecola (AI), Deputy General Prosecutor at the Italian Court of Auditors, gave a presentation focussing on the work carried out under the 'CATONE project' by the Court of Auditors in Italy. He explained that the aim of the CATONE project (which was 80% funded by OLAF's Hercule III programme) was to facilitate the sharing of practical and new experiences among stakeholders to fight fraud.

AI talked briefly about some of the trainings and events which were carried out as part of the project. He also focussed on a major hybrid conference, which was hosted at the Court of Auditors in Rome (May 2021). The two-day event, which was held as part of the CATONE project, attracted over 1200 participants and was addressed by 40 speakers from a range of organisations including OLAF, AFCOS from many member states, the European Court of Auditors, and the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO).

Reflecting on the outcomes of the CATONE project, AI said that it led to the exchange of best practices and to the strengthening of bonds with the Court of Auditors and other members of the European anti-fraud network. He cited the fact that a cooperation agreement between the Court of Auditors and EPPO was signed, in September 2021, as proof of this improved working bonds.

Network & Communication Practices of the Greek National Transparency Authority

1) Mr Dimosthenis Avarkiotis, NTA Head of AFCOS Unit, explained the objectives of the AFCOS network and communication platform, which provide a range of services aimed at helping gather and exchange relevant information in the fight against fraud. He detailed the content of the platform such as: accessible tools for networking, newsletters, legal frameworks, information and best practices. Contact details about anti-fraud organisations at national and European level (such as OLAF) were made available. Manual guides and handbooks, studies and reports, general information material, case studies in Greek and risk analysis tools were also presented as key points of the network and communication platform. Moreover, NTA and AFCOS organised seminars and trainings on fraud prevention and detection.

2) Ms Georgia Zarkinou (GZ), NTA Head of Communication and awareness department, talked about the first ever 'Integrity Forum' organised by the NTA as a way to mark the International Anti-Corruption Day (9 December).

The forum focussed on the importance of protecting the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and economic reform programs. The forum featured discussions on the regulation of lobbying and the transposition of the Whistleblowing Directive. During the event, results of public opinion polls carried out by NTA on corruption issues were presented. High-ranking officials from the Greek Parliament, the Greek Government, the Hellenic Police and the Cybercrime Division participated in the forum. There were also exchanges of views on data, the role of internal auditors, the strengthening of fraud detection mechanisms and the challenges of migration flows and NGO's role. The central message of the forum was "Strengthening citizens' trust in public institutions".

GZ also referred to the latest year's communication actions which included, among others, a campaign to highlight negative impact that fraud has on institutions, citizens' trust and

social inequalities. This campaign was accompanied by multimedia actions including TV advertising and social media posts aimed at raising awareness of the issues especially among young people. The campaign was designed and implemented by the staff of NTA's Communication Department at zero cost to citizens.

3) Ms Angeliki Matsouka (AM), Chief of Cabinet Unit of Customs – Director General, Independent Authority for Public Revenue, gave an overview of the communication campaigns which focussed on citizens and included actions relating to combat fraud and smuggling.

AM praised the work of Greek customs agents saying that the pandemic did not prevent the customs from combatting smuggling and protecting financial interests. She cited examples of the good work that was carried out during the pandemic, including the confiscation of millions of illegal cigarettes and the seizure of hundreds of kilos of cocaine. AM also talked about changes to the internal structure of the Independent Authority for Public Revenue that took place in January 2022.

Working session 2: Future communication campaigns

Tour de table on members' recent communication activities and communication plans for 2022

JC previewed the OLAF 2021 report, which is due to be published by June 2022. A press release in all EU languages will be released to coincide with the publication. The main focus of the report will be the protection of the EU green recovery.

Ms Tatiana Prievalská Bartošová (TP), representing the Unit National Office for OLAF within the Control Section of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic (Slovak AFCOS), talked about the contents of their three newsletters, the first of which focused on the EPPO, the RRF and the meeting between the Prime Minister of Slovakia and the EC President, whilst the second looked at the AFCOS network in Slovakia and the third centred on the publication and contents of the 2020 PIF report.

TP ended by listing some of their planned future activities which include organising monthly seminars on various topics related to the protection of the EU financial interests, the publication of the annual report, and the promotion of an email address where citizens can report fraud.

Colonel Luciano Luzzi (LL) from the Italian Guardia di Finanza (GdF) shared a video which showed the work which was undertaken by the GdF and which was well received by the participants. LL also referred to the work done to create a tailored communication plan, including ways to communicate on new methods of fraud. He said there was a plan to update their web portal. LL also talked about using podcasts as a new communication tool, which generated a great deal of interest from participants.

5. Conclusions and next steps

JC spoke in more detail of the proposed in person OAFCN seminar, scheduled for the autumn (depending on the Covid situation). The seminar would last two days and allow for more in-depth discussions, brainstorming, and some practical sessions on technical communications. JC

asked to receive input by April/May on what members would find most relevant and useful to discuss at the seminar.

Several participants wanted to explore the idea of creating podcasts as a way to communicate their actions. Ms Ruth Haliti from the German Central Customs Authority said she would be willing to share some of her Office's examples and experiences of podcasts with the network.

A brief live survey on possible joint communication actions showed a great interest of members to do joint or coordinated press releases, synergies in retweeting, social media campaigns and webinars.

Additional enthusiasm was also found for the suggestions: to send to OLAF 1 infographic per service on a successful anti-fraud case that can be publicised on OLAF's website and social media; to share/receive feedback on the success stories of projects financed by Hercule grants; to pitch interviews with OLAF senior management as well as OLAF's annual report press materials to key national media.

The network will continue with deepening cooperation among members on: 1) communication – to both prevent and deter fraud by raising public awareness about the fight against fraud, 2) networking – to improve cooperation and exchange best practices between communicators, and 3) training – to educate both members and journalists about anti-fraud communication.

OLAF will circulate minutes of the meeting and all featured presentations will be sent to participants.

6. Participants

LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	ORGANISATION	
BRECKPOT	Stephane	Federal Public Service Finance	Belgium
TODOROVA	Tsvetelina	Ministry of Interior - AFCOS Directorate	Bulgaria
GENOVA	Vlara	National Customs Agency	Bulgaria
NIKOLOVA	Desislava	National Customs Agency	Bulgaria
MOLL	Jesper	Danish Customs Agency	Denmark
BACKES	Lea	Ministry of Finance	Denmark
HALITI	Ruth	Generalzolldirektion - Zollkriminalamt (ZKA) Central Customs Authority - Federal Customs Criminological Office	Germany
RICHTER	Florian	Generalzolldirektion - Zollkriminalamt (ZKA) Central Customs Authority - Federal Customs Criminological Office	Germany
BOYCE	Ciaran	Department of Finance	Ireland
AVARKIOTIS	Dimosthenis	"National Transparency Authority, General Directorate of Integrity and Accountability Anti-Fraud Coordination Service (AFCOS)"	Greece

MATΣΟΥΚΑ	ΑΓΓΕΛΙΚΗ	Customs and Excise, Independent Authority for Public Revenue	Greece
GAVALA	Sofia	"National Transparency Authority, General Directorate of Integrity and Accountability Anti-Fraud Coordination Service (AFCOS)"	Greece
KAOURA	Georgia	National Transparency Authority	Greece
KASAPAS	George	National Transparency Authority	Greece
PAVLIKIANIS	Konstantinos	"National Transparency Authority, General Directorate of Integrity and Accountability Anti-Fraud Coordination Service (AFCOS)"	Greece
SAKELLARIOU	Athanasios	"National Transparency Authority, General Directorate of Integrity and Accountability Anti-Fraud Coordination Service (AFCOS)"	Greece
ZARKINOY	Georgia	National Transparency Authority	Greece
BERNÁCER	Teresa	Agencia Tributaria - Tax Agency	Spain
MALCLES	Marie-Laure	Délégation nationale à la lutte contre la fraude (AFCOS)	France
RAMLJAK	Ivana	Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds	Croatia
JURIĆ	Mirjana	Service for combating irregularities and fraud (AFCOS)	Croatia
CIMARELLI	Maurizio	Agenzia delle Dogane e dei Monopoli (Customs)	Italy
PISONI	Lorenzo	Agenzia delle Dogane e dei Monopoli (Customs)	Italy
CORSETTI	Carlo	Associated member	Italy
CALISE	Francesca	Corte dei conti	Italy
IADECOLA	Arturo	Corte dei Conti	Italy
POMPONIO	Alessandra	Corte dei Conti - Court of Auditors 1	Italy
GIARDINIERI	Massimo	Guardia di Finanza	Italy
NOCETI	Aldo	Guardia di Finanza	Italy
CAVALIERI	Valentina	IT Customs	Italy
BRANCHI	Vincenzo	Italian AFCOS -Department of European Policies, Presidency of Council of Ministers	Italy
LIZZI	Luciano	Permanent Representation of Italy to the EU	Italy
FANTIDOU	Eliza	Excise & customs	Cyprus
ANDREOU	Christos	Police	Cyprus
GRĪNVALDE	Lelde	Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Latvia (AFCOS)	Latvia
KABANOVA	Inita	State Revenue Service	Latvia
KEBLIENĒ	Renata	Special Investigation Service	Lithuania

GAJGER	Georgina	National Tax and Customs Administration (AFCOS)	Hungary
SCHMIDT	GáBor	Office of the Prosecutor General	Hungary
DELIA	Daniel	Customs	Malta
GALEA	Rachel	Customs	Malta
AZZOPARDI	Kurt	Internal Audit & Investigations Department	Malta
CALLEJA	Kevin	Internal Audit & Investigations Department	Malta
BURGER	Karin	Customs Administration of the Netherlands	Netherlands
STEGEMAN	Mariska	Customs Administration of the Netherlands	Netherlands
KWIECIŃSKA	Dorota	Ministry of Finance - Department for the audit of public funds (PL-AFCOS)	Poland
RUDOWSKA	Emilia	Ministry of Finance - Department for the audit of public funds (PL-AFCOS)	Poland
SOCZEWKA	Tomasz	Ministry of Finance - Department for the audit of public funds (PL-AFCOS)	Poland
MOTA TORRES	Alexandra	Autoridade Tributária e Aduaneira – Tax and Customs Authority	Portugal
FERNANDES	Helder	Republican National Guard - Unidade de Acção Fiscal	Portugal
CARMEN	Rascanu	Fight Against Fraud Department - DLAF, Romanian Government	Romania
DINTOI	Bogdan Ionut	Fight Against Fraud Department - DLAF, Romanian Government	Romania
KURE	Irena	Ministry of Finance, Budget Supervision Office (AFCOS)	Slovenia
PRIEVALSKA BARTOSOVA	Tatiana	Control Section - Government Office of the Slovak Republic	Slovakia
PŠAK	Michal	Control Section - Government Office of the Slovak Republic	Slovakia
HABAROVÁ	AlžBeta	Criminal Office of the Financial Administration	Slovakia
ONDREJOVÁ	Anna	General Prosecution Office	Slovakia
BELOVICKA	Barbora	Section of Recovery at the Government office of Slovak republic	Slovakia
KRALIK	Jan	Section of Recovery at the Government office of Slovak republic	Slovakia
TURKAMA	Kati	Customs	Finland
TIALA	Toni	Ministry of Finance (AFCOS)	Finland
STRIDSMAN	Henrik	Tullverket - Customs	Sweden
KEARNEY	Caroline	European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (EUROJUST)	EUROJUST

KAROLINY	Eszter	European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (EUROJUST)	EUROJUST
ROSATI	Lorenzo	EUROPEAN COMMISSION	DG ECFIN
HOLLEVOET	Tine	European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO)	EPPO
OP GEN OORTH	Jan	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL)	EUROPOL