

THE GUARDIA DI FINANZA'S ANTI-FRAUD COMMUNICATION POLICY

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There can be no doubt that OLAF's Anti-Fraud Communicators Network offers a great opportunity to weigh up and assess the next steps the European institutions and authorities involved in the fight against fraud will need to take if they are to tailor their actions more closely to the objectives they are pursuing and to make them even more effective.

The arrival of ten new Member States in 2004 has increased the challenge, shifting Europe's focus more towards the East and the markets there.

The relationship between activity and communication is a key topic today. It is generally recognised that effective communication increases the effectiveness of the work done by any organisation involved in fighting fraud, raising its profile and increasing support. Basically, communication adds value to daily operations by bringing the public into contact with the organisation and sending out the message that it is working for everyone.

Clearly, we need a carefully devised media policy for publicising objectives, capitalising on achievements and projects, and informing the public in general if we are to gain the legitimising support of public opinion and business for the role officially assigned to us by current laws.

However, to avoid the pitfall of paying more attention to the tools and techniques of communication, i.e. the form, than to the content, which is the organisation's finished product, or its everyday usefulness we need to have a clear understanding of the organisations' respective tasks and of developments in the world outside, availing ourselves of the benchmarks and changing scenarios for our operations.

The Guardia di Finanza sees this question as so important that in March this year it issued a special internal circular setting out our communication plan for 2004.

While its work is recognised and appreciated by the State and its institutions, when policing the worlds of business and finance, the Guardia di Finanza can at times unfairly acquire the image of the revenue officer with nothing to do but check tax documents or examine accounts. While such figures are irreproachable professionally speaking, they are far removed from the general public.

The problem is not therefore the lack of a media profile. It is, if anything, how to harness the individual channels of information (press releases, interviews and television reports) in such a way as to prevent excessive fragmentation from distorting the image, at the risk of placing too much emphasis on how the organisation would like to appear rather than on its awareness of what it actually is.

All police forces provide security, a value they traditionally promote by communicating at length and in detail on arrests, seizures and offences reported. The message is simple and hits home because everyone has suffered injustices and abuses of power.

The Guardia di Finanza's position is slightly more complex. In addition to personal freedom, freedom to settle, freedom to own property and freedom of expression, the Italian Constitution makes provision for economic freedom (freedom to conduct business, freedom to enter into contracts, the free market and savings).

Fraud endangers economic freedoms by unduly encouraging tax evasion and avoidance, unfair competition and organised crime. Without the minimum degree of economic security, trade declines and economic and financial insecurity lead inevitably to recession.

By policing the world of business and finance, the Guardia di Finanza plays a key role in the Italian system of controls set up to safeguard national and European financial interests.

Legislative Decree No 68 of 19 March 2001 requires the Guardia di Finanza to safeguard the budgets of the State, the Regions, the local authorities and the European Union. It assigns to the Guardia di Finanza the specific tasks of prevention, investigation and prosecution of offences involving “customs and border duties as well as the European Union’s own resources and expenditure.”

In close cooperation with the authorities responsible for safeguarding economic freedoms, the Guardia di Finanza performs operations that help to create a secure framework for safeguarding commercial relations (tax audits and technical checks, air and naval patrols, police and other financial and assets-based investigations) and, of course, conducts prevention activities that cannot be measured and therefore objectively demonstrated.

In the final analysis, the Guardia di Finanza’s daily operations make it the police force with most experience in safeguarding the economic and financial interests of the State and the European Union. This is the key message that the Guardia di Finanza has recently been trying to get across in preparation for one of the most important challenges that we will shortly have to meet.

I would like to thank OLAF for organising this important event, which I am sure will give rise to valuable suggestions and approaches, and for having given the Guardia di Finanza the opportunity to bring its ideas to the round table.

We are aware of the scale of the problem and know that we need a common communications strategy, which we can develop only – and in part thanks to this type of initiative – with the support of OLAF and its Anti-Fraud Communicators Network.

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