

## **Minutes of the 24<sup>th</sup> OAFCN meeting, Zagreb, 12-13 June 2014**

### **Welcome address by the hosts**

Agnes Horvath (AH) welcomed members and thanked the co-hosts, the Croatian Service for Combatting Irregularities and Fraud, for their help in the organisation of the meeting. She reminded that the new two half-day meeting format had been asked by members to ensure as many as possible attend the whole meeting. She welcomed two new members to the Network – Mr Andrei Chendi, Acting State Secretary and Head of DLAF (RO) and Mr Petr Maly, Spokesperson of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office (CZ) – as well as representatives from services that had not participated in recent meetings (ES, UK). She informed members that OLAF is considering reintroducing some interpretation at OAFCN regular meetings. The Network will be kept informed and members are encouraged to inform OLAF of their particular interpretation needs, if any, prior to meetings.

Ivan Vinscak, representing the Croatian Service for combatting irregularities & fraud (AFCOS), expressed his pleasure to co-host the meeting, saying that it was a valuable platform to communicate on anti-fraud issues across Europe, between law enforcement bodies and the media.

### **Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda was adopted with no amendments.

### **Approval of the minutes of the 23<sup>rd</sup> OAFCN meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting (of 29 November 2013) were approved.

### **One year after the accession to the EU – Branko Baricevic, Head of EC Representation in Croatia**

Branko Baricevic (BB) said that in terms of Croatia's accession negotiations, chapter 23 on the fight against corruption and organised crime had been the most challenging. The overall opinion in Croatia is generally in favour of EU membership. He said that Croatia is facing challenges, namely an economic crisis, and the hope is that EU membership will help them out of it. He mentioned a recent joint conference organised by DG Regional Policy and Transparency International, at which OLAF had participated, on the use of EU money. There had also been good media coverage following OLAF Director-General's visit to Croatia last October. BB encouraged such future initiatives.

### **Success stories in anti-fraud communication – Ana Odak, Croatian Ministry of regional development & EU funds**

As part of their 2013-2016 action plan, a very successful EU funds week had been organised with several Member States in February. Still on the theme of EU funds, workshops for journalists had taken place, with real cases presented, and as a result of which media coverage had improved. Workshops for Croatian politicians are ongoing.

### **Anti-fraud journalism in Croatia – Ana Raic Knezevic, Croatian journalists' association**

Ana Raic Knezevic presented the challenges faced by investigative journalism in Croatia. Generally, there are very few active journalists in Croatia and they tend to be young, untrained and unfamiliar

with the EU. She said Croatian courts are also slow in delivering verdicts, with cases pending for 2-3 years and journalists forgetting about the cases. She also mentioned the lack of responses from public authorities on fraud and corruption cases and insisted on the need for journalists to receive prompt replies to press questions.

In response, several OAFCN members suggested the benefits of social media as a means of spreading and obtaining information. They also reminded of the legal constraints that public authorities face (e.g. respect for procedural rights, presumption of innocence, respect for legal proceedings etc).

### **Briefing for journalists in cooperation with the ZKA – Sylke Zabel, ZKA**

Alina Burea (AB) said this was a pilot project which OLAF would like to repeat with 1-2 events a year with national counterparts as part of the 2014 OAFCN action plan and forthcoming ones.

Sylke Zabel (SZ) presented this background information seminar for journalists, which was entitled “Fighting fraud in Europe”. It was co-hosted with OLAF and took place on 7 May in Bonn. 15-20 journalists (from local and main German publications) were invited.

SZ said the aim was for it to serve as a platform to present our daily anti-fraud work and better cooperate with journalists. OLAF’s latest annual report, the ZKA investigative results for the year and some concrete cases had been presented (smuggling cases, joint customs operations etc). SZ and AB concluded that the event had been successful and that the key message is ‘we’: cooperation between national services, OLAF and the media.

### **OAFCN 2014 action plan**

AH encouraged members to report back on what they have achieved as part of the 2014 action plan and said that the overall results will be announced at the next meeting. She proposed continuing into next year the 2014 actions - briefings for journalists, image bank, JCO-specific media campaign, joint press releases and social media – and invited suggestions for new actions. There were no objections raised to the proposal to keep the same Advisory Board members until the next meeting.

The following comments were made on the current actions:

Image bank: AB encouraged feeding of it (with for example images of JCOs and other audiovisual materials) which journalists really appreciate. OLAF can also help provide members with audiovisual material from the European Commission service.

Briefings for journalists: Gian Luca Berruti (GdF) suggested involving several Member States. AB said OLAF is interested in new candidates to co-host them and may target some services directly.

JCO campaigns: AB mentioned that an OLAF press release concerning operation Warehouse had recently been published and had received wide media coverage, with mirror press releases issued on the same day by participating Member States. This was an excellent result that could guide future OAFCN work.

Joint press releases: a recent example of mirroring OLAF and Greek customs press releases on cigarette smuggling in March and May was presented.

Social media: some members referred to difficulties and constraints in using social media, whilst others presented its advantages. A list showing the presence on social media of member services was distributed.

In terms of broader issues, AH mentioned an internal photo competition which OLAF launched this year in response to a lack of photos in its image bank. Such a competition may be extended to the Network and DK customs suggested also disseminating it via Instagram. AH suggested for 2015 exploring the possibility of putting together school kits on anti-fraud matters. OLAF is developing one of its own which will include its new promotional videos and video game application (presented below).

AH also alerted members of an OLAF press release of March on the new Hercule III programme, offering national services the possibility to apply for co-financing. She said a press release on the calls for proposals would follow (which was sent to members in the days following the event).

Members were also reminded that those wishing to send messages to the Network should do this via the OAFCN secretariat. The secretariat will collect relevant materials and distribute them to the Network in a timely manner.

#### **OLAF video game and Open Day stand – Emily Fairless, OLAF**

Emily Fairless encouraged members to promote the new video game at national level and to give feedback to OLAF on how it's received. She said they could use the pack of EU Open Day materials produced by OLAF (softball game and photo backdrops, cardboard cut-outs and posters) at their own public events to communicate anti-fraud messages to young people. This is in line with the proposal of some members to participate in initiatives in schools and universities and so seek to educate young audiences on anti-fraud issues.

This year's aim of OLAF's stand was to target teenagers with concrete examples of how OLAF's work affects citizens' everyday lives.

The OLAF video game, which was initially developed as an iPad application for the Open Day stand, is currently downloadable in this format from the Apple store (<https://itunes.apple.com/be/app/anti-fraud-game-stop-fraudsters/id871872607?ls=1&mt=8>). The next stage is to develop it as a web application when the OAFCN will be asked to distribute it.

AH presented OLAF's two new promotional videos – a 1-minute spot (presenting a day-in-the-life of OLAF's work for the general public) and a longer documentary (reconstituting a real fraud case and targeting a more specialised audience). The OAFCN's help will be asked to disseminate them.

#### **Communicating OLAF results: OLAF report 2013 – Alina Burea, OLAF**

The OLAF annual report was presented at a press conference on 29 April. AB presented its key messages and statistics and gave an insight into the overall organisation of the event from the perspective of the OLAF press office. She added that the broad and very good media coverage in

mainstream media was partly thanks to the help of the OAFCN members who actively contributed by diffusing the press materials. She thanked them and encouraged them to continue disseminating OLAF materials.

AB also encouraged member services to share their guidelines on external communication with OLAF. Members were invited to send any such manuals to the secretariat.

### **Communication strategies to reach multiple and multicultural audiences – Thomas Fitzsimons, The Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria**

The Fund, based in Geneva, recently signed an administrative cooperation agreement with OLAF. It allocates money to countries (mainly national health ministries) with the aim of helping them to fight the diseases. Most of this money (95%) is public money and the European Commission is a major donor. Thomas Fitzsimons works at the office of the inspector-general, the watchdog of the Fund which ensures public funds are spent for their due purpose. They have recently revamped their communication strategy which aims to be fully transparent. This can, however, involve huge risks as they deal with sensitive cases concerning misuse of funds, which if not communicated correctly could make donors reluctant to donate. When dealing with the media, his office strives to ensure that the key stakeholders have all the information prior to any publication. He gave an example of some extensive and bad media coverage in the UK. To take the sting out of this, his office provided all the key players with facts to give to the media and so take out the sensationalism. He advised communication specialists to provide information to the media. They also recently reworked their reports to make them more appealing to the media (rather than bureaucratic).

His office may organise a press briefing for the UN international anti-corruption day on 9 December.

### **Successful communication strategies – Marijana Bukic, Croatian customs**

Marijana Bukic gave a general introduction to the structure and tasks of Croatian customs. She mentioned a JCO that took place in 2012 called Shadow V concerning cigarettes. She said that Croatian customs find the AFIS (anti-fraud information system) platform, used by OLAF and most Members, a very useful IT tool. They use the EC concept of IBM (integrated border management) to improve cooperation at the border.

### **Communication actions on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Slovenian customs lab – Sabina Langus Boc, Slovenian customs**

To mark its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, SI customs presented its lab both externally and internally by offering a guided tour of it to customs officers and by hosting an open day for the media. Sabina Langus Boc (SLB) also showed a short promotional video they had produced internally.

By means of presenting the role of their lab, SLB described some recent cases which had involved the cooperation of OLAF. One of them concerned the evasion of customs duties on garlic imported into the EU. SI customs were alerted by an increase in a 1-clove variety of garlic (called 'elephant') from China which does not incur additional excise duties. DNA analyses confirmed a misclassification. The other case concerned open mesh fabrics of glass fibre. Similarly in this case the alarm was raised

when an increase in imports from other Asian countries than China, to avoid considerable anti-dumping duties, were detected. Payment claims to the value of € 700,000 are underway.

### **What technology can do for compliance – Karin Burger, Dutch customs**

Buying online has exploded in recent years and there is a problem of counterfeit goods. Market research revealed that citizens need more information in this area. Karin Burger (KB) said that, to this end, NL customs has developed a new virtual assistance online tool to answer customers' general questions concerning their online purchases.

The aim is to inform customers and so increase compliance, i.e. them voluntarily paying taxes. It is a platform for online dialogue, whereby the answers are instantaneous. Asked how specific the answers are, KB said if you provide a detailed question, it will give you a detailed answer (with reference to additional information on the home page). Although a 'front office' with the public, back-office support is also needed. It is considered to be an economic solution in the long-term. Currently in a test phase, the tool should be published on the NL customs website by the end of June. It will also be put on the websites of the four big couriers (DHL etc.). KB said she will convey the outcome of its publication at the next OAFCN meeting.

### **Communication brokered by unconventional media vectors. Fiction, press conferences and other possible original ideas for the OAFCN – Gian Luca Berruti, Guardia di Finanza**

Gian Luca Berruti advised that the OAFCN communication strategy should involve minimal costs (due to the economic crisis) and urged members to be daring in their communication efforts. The GdF has an online press room, which includes its own images. Their practice is to publish information - headlines, footage and images - on their cases instantaneously on their website and on social media. The GdF mentioned that an Italian public broadcaster will be filming a new TV series in October, centred around a fictional GdF officer, which will be broadcast in the Spring of 2015. Amongst other concrete actions he suggested for the Network was to launch a competition, targeting young people, with prizes.

### **Future actions**

The next regular meeting will be early in 2015

The next training seminar will be in the second half of 2015 – volunteers to co-host it should contact OLAF

Members to feedback on their service's implementation of the 2014 action plan and to give us your suggestions for 2015 action points

OAFCN members are called upon to assist in distributing the OLAF videos, video game and press materials

Send us your communication guidelines

Send us any material you would like us to distribute to the Network