

# Minutes of the 23rd OAFCN Meeting, 29 November 2013

## 1. Welcome note

Mr Kessler opened the meeting with introductory remarks on the importance of anti-fraud communication in the EU in this particular period. The ongoing economic crisis is drawing the public opinion's attention to issues such as waste of money, corruption and fraud, and the demand for anti-fraud bodies to act is increasing. It is thus important to communicate well on the successes of anti-fraud authorities throughout Europe and to concentrate on proactive communication, rather than on defensive communication only. This is in order to raise the public's awareness of the work of anti-fraud authorities, and avoid a perception of inactivity that may be conveyed if such authorities do not communicate enough. For OLAF, this means disseminating successful cases, good results achieved, etc. and sharing them with national authorities widely. The objective of such communication is to explain how the EC protects the rule of law and the financial interests of EU citizens - the same money that makes, amongst others, research, social funds and investments possible. Finally, he made reference to the importance of the Commission's proposal of July 2013 on the setting up of a European Public Prosecutor's Office. This will be an essential project if the EU wants to build a common space of justice, and a project on which the OAFCN should communicate pro-actively in due time.

Agnes Horvath (AH) introduced Alina Burea (AB), new OLAF Spokesperson since last May, and welcomed 5 new members: Ms Elena Martinonien, new head of communications at the Prosecutor General's Office (LT), Ms Andrea NAGY, from the Prosecution Service (HU), Mr György Juhász, from the National Tax and Customs Administration (HU), Mr Giovanni De Roma, new Head of Guardia di Finanza Press Office (IT) and Mr Javier Garrido, from Agencia Tributaria (SP). She also informed that the meeting's presentations will be available on extranet.

## 2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without amendments.

## 3. Approval of the minutes of the 22<sup>nd</sup> OAFCN Meeting

The minutes of the previous 22<sup>nd</sup> OAFCN meeting were approved without amendments.

## 4. COCOLAF & OLAF expert groups (Dusan Sterle, OLAF)

Dusan Sterle (DS) presented the approved structure of COCOLAF (the Advisory Committee on the Coordination of Fraud Prevention) and of its expert groups/subgroups, which was formally endorsed by the Member States at the last COCOLAF meeting on 22 November. The Sub-groups/Expert groups are: the Fraud Prevention Group; the AFCOS Group, the Reporting and Analysis of Fraudulent and Other Irregularities Group, the Euro Counterfeit Experts Group (ECEG), the Counterfeit Coin Experts Group (CCEG) and the OLAF Anti-Fraud Communicators Network (OAFCN). The new structure aims to rationalise the work of COCOLAF further, to ensure the attendance of the relevant experts and to make it as efficient as possible. DS emphasised that all relevant areas of cooperation between OLAF and the Member States are therefore covered. DS stressed the importance for all the subgroups to deliver tangible results.

In this context, the OAFCN will continue bringing together spokespersons and public relations officers from involved national authorities and OLAF. Communication experts will continue to share media strategies and initiate communication activities on fraud prevention and deterrence.

AH explained that in light of the new COCOLAF structure, the OAFCN will hold, in principle, one regular meeting per year (excluding the OAFCN training seminar, one every second year). Additional events can be organised, if needed, on an ad-hoc basis. As concerns the financial rules for regular meetings, OLAF will bear travel expenses for maximum 4 full OAFCN members per Member State, but no accommodation can be offered. If any additional OAFCN members are willing to join, or if a member institution chooses to send more than one delegate, each organisation will cover the costs of these extra delegates.

AH also added a clarification concerning the OAFCN Membership: in order to be in line with the membership rules on the EC register of expert groups, from 2014 the OAFCN membership will be limited to "full members" only (relevant representatives of competent national authorities working on anti-fraud communication). OAFCN "observers" will continue to be regularly updated on OAFCN activities and can be invited by OLAF on an ad-hoc basis to play an active role/to make presentations.

Ivana Ramljak (IR - Ministry of Finance, Croatia) proposed to host the next OAFCN meeting in Croatia. The competent authorities from her MS had already expressed support for such an initiative. IR suggested that the meeting might take place in June in Dubrovnik (on the basis of the success of the AFCOS conference organised by OLAF in 2012) or in Zagreb. AH asked to be updated of any planned events of any members around that time, in order to find most suitable date.

DS reminded that the HERCULE programme provides grants funding for action to combat fraud affecting the EU's financial interests. He encouraged applications for grants covering the area of communication.

#### **5. Recent policy developments in the fight against fraud and corruption (Susanne Knoefel and Emer Traynor, EC)**

Emer Traynor, Spokesperson of Commissioner Šemeta responsible for tax, customs, statistics, audit and anti-fraud matters, described her daily work in the Commission Spokesperson service dealing with the press. The Commission daily midday briefing, which can be viewed online via Europe by Satellite (EbS), is attended by some 800 accredited journalists, who put questions to the Commission on-the-record. She said that anti-fraud issues are the most delicate area of her work because of the need to respect the presumption of innocence, the confidentiality of investigations and data protection requirements. She outlined the four general press approaches used by the Commission:

- proactive: to pro-actively push messages on an issue that the Commission supports, e.g. the proposal to establish a European Public Prosecutors' Office (EPPO);
- proactive, but a bit more cautious: Annual anti-fraud reports for which it is essential to explain well the figures so that they are not mis-interpreted, but where fraud should not be over-emphasised, over-dramatised;
- say as little as possible: sensitive fraud cases which are on-going and for which confidentiality and data protection rules make communication very delicate.
- non-communication: for example on OLAF's (independent) investigative work.

Susanne Knoefel, from the Cabinet of Commissioner Šemeta, spoke of her work in the field of inter-institutional relations, such as for instance with the European Parliament and the Council. She mentioned that on policy issues, the Commissioner and OLAF are in regular contact via monthly meetings. She reported that the Commission is currently consulting Member States on a legislative proposal for the establishment of an EPPO. She also updated members on the OLAF reform, which had been under negotiation for the last 7 years between the EU institutions, and was approved before the summer. This reform will consolidate procedural rights in OLAF investigations, increase cooperation with Member States and overall strengthen OLAF.

A brief question and answer session followed where the two representatives shared views on their daily work as well as on challenges ahead in terms of communicating on anti-fraud issues.

#### **6. Implementation of 2012-2013 OAFCN Action Plan and drafting 2014 Action Plan (Advisory Board members)**

AH proposed the extension of the mandate of the 6 members of the current Advisory Board for another year, which was unanimously approved. Before giving the floor to the Advisory Board members, AH reiterated the need to focus on the outcome/tangible results in the next Action Plan of the OAFCN in 2014.

Sabina Langus Boc (SLB – Slovenian Customs) took the floor on behalf of the Adv Board and presented the state of implementation and results achieved by the 2012-2013 Action Plan:

The media lists and image bank had the best implementation rates (of approx. a third of members). OLAF has the (image bank) images in stock which are available on request. Regarding the yearly press review, as many national articles were not in English and since most members had access to all relevant articles through web news media aggregators, it did not seem sensible to compile it any longer. The "joint media campaign" had initially been foreseen only if a joint customs operation (JCO) would have taken place in 2013. As this hadn't been the case, this explained why the media campaign had not been implemented. The services who completed the most actions overall were Bulgarian Ministry of Interior, Irish Revenue Commissioners & Slovak Government Office.

Lorenzo Pisoni (LP – Italian Customs) presented the actions suggested by the Advisory Board for the OAFCN AP2014 and he opened the discussion. AB emphasised the need for members to consider which actions their services would be willing to undertake, and reiterated the need to choose a set of common deliverables. She asked the OAFCN members to list 3 actions their services would be capable/willing to implement in 2014. A tour de table followed.

## 7. OAFCN Action Plan: wrap-up session and conclusions

AB listed the actions on which the tour de table has brought out consensus, namely:

a. Continue the following actions in the OAFCN Action Plan 2014:

1. **Briefings for journalists:** on-the-record or off-the-record events for journalists. The aim would be to inform journalists about how fraud is fought jointly at national and EU level, and about cooperation between the services, OLAF and the other OAFCN members. These events will include the participation of one or several Member States, together with OLAF.
2. **Image bank:** photos and/or videos produced by members' services of, for example, customs controls/seizures, counterfeit goods etc. These are essential in "showing" anti-fraud authorities in action, in bringing them closer to the public.
3. **JCO-specific media campaign:** this action will be carried out if one or more JCOs go ahead in 2014. It would involve explaining to the press of the participating Members and EU press the purpose and results of the JCO, with the support of visuals. This would be prepared in a timely manner and results communicated on the same day but all the participants on the basis of jointly agreed key messages.

b. Include the following actions in the OAFCN Action Plan 2014:

4. **Joint press releases:** increase the number of joint press releases about cross-border fraud and/or cases where two or more OAFCN partners worked together (with or without OLAF).
5. **Social media:** share content on social media regarding any anti-fraud communication activities and/or strategies. Such exchanges should start taking place in 2014 between those Members who engage officially on social media. Content should be widely distributed across the network.

c. Consider the following long-term actions which would require resource-intensive planning:

6. **Anti-fraud day:** establish an anti-fraud event to jointly raise awareness of anti-fraud policies of OAFCN members. The Anti-fraud day can be organised either in one place (Brussels?) or in all the EU28 concurrently. The materials and key messages would be jointly prepared by OAFCN members in advance.
7. **Targeted communication activities within schools/universities:** explain to younger audiences what anti-fraud agencies do – both at national and international level. The aim is to increase deterrence. Materials and/or messages and/ or active participation by several OAFCN members would be shared.

In addition to the above-listed actions, Members were encouraged to continue sharing on an on-going basis projects of interest, the results of communication campaigns of relevance to OAFCN etc.

Two other actions proposed by the Adv Board were not included in the AP as they didn't have the majority (OAFCN success stories booklet & list of contact numbers to Report fraud).

## 8. European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) & new OLAF Regulation (Andrea Venegoni, OLAF)

Andrea Venegoni (AV) illustrated the Commission's proposal to establish an EPPO, which would allow criminal investigations in the area of fraud affecting the EU budget, without the need for the traditional mutual assistance or mutual recognition instruments in cross-border cases, thus creating an EU single legal area. The EPPO's ambit of work would fall within the protection of the EU financial interests (including fraud, corruption, money laundering but also possibly the offences provided for in the proposal of PIF Directive of July 2012). The Office would be headed by a Chief

Prosecutor assisted by 4 deputies and other staff. It will also include European delegated prosecutors in the Member States, who are at the same time national prosecutors but depending only on the EPPO for matters related to the EU financial issues, for which the EPPO would have exclusive competence. The Proposal is embedded in strong procedural rights. OLAF will continue to conduct investigations related to EU staff on allegations that do not fall into the EPPO competence. The new OLAF regulation entered into force on 1 October 2013 has also strengthened procedural rights. Furthermore, it introduced a mandatory provision for Member States to follow up and report on cases initiated by OLAF.

#### **9. MS case study: Sylke Zabel (Zollkriminalamt, Germany)**

SZ presented the operation "PANGEA" by the ZKA on combating the sale of illegal medicines online. PANGEA is an international week of action against online sale of counterfeit or illicit medicines highlighting the dangers of buying medicine online. Coordinated by INTERPOL, it is a joint action of customs, health regulators, national police and private sector. From 10 participating countries during the first operational week in 2008, it got to 99 participating countries in 2013 week of action, achieving worldwide results. The online purchase of pharmaceutical products being potentially dangerous for consumers, raising awareness by informing the public is fundamental.

#### **10. MS case study: Tiia Sulander-Seppänen (Customs, Finland)**

The pilot campaign "Grey economy - black future" was launched 2011 by the Finnish Police with the aim to raise public awareness, take preventive action against economic crime in Finland, share information about shadow economy and economic crime and promote joint responsibility. The actions implemented included the dissemination of the effects shadow economy has on everyday life, how people can prevent shadow economy and economic crime with simple actions, the promotion of customer responsibility ("Always demand a receipt") and individual responsibility ("Make sure that you'll get a proper job contract"), while enhancing healthy entrepreneurship. An educational programme in schools was also carried out.

#### **11. MS reports: Giovanni De Roma/Gian Luca Berruti (Guardia di Finanza, Italy)**

##### **- OAFCN initiatives for the citizens**

GDR reminded that frauds and other misconducts are a threat to European financial-economic interests and the main cause of European financial resources reduction. People must help to detect and fight against frauds by reporting them, adopting a more cautious approach and being aware of them. To achieve our goal, public bodies have to avoid self-referential communication, spread the «financial-economic legality» culture, and adopt diversified and differentiated communication strategies. For example, middle-aged people could be reached through sport events, or mothers by raising awareness that fraud and fake products can damage their dear ones.

##### **- Report on the OAFCN Training Seminar in Rome**

GLB wrapped up the results of the training seminar in Rome. Among other topics, the seminar focussed on the potential of new communication tools; how social media can help in the fight against fraud; exploiting cartoons to raise public awareness against fraud; using cartoons to instil an institutional message into young people; Europol's social media platform and examples of how criminals exploit social media; how social media can help to advertise an EU campaign. GLB concluded that it is fundamental to think outside the box when designing communication campaigns by looking at what attracts people's attention.

#### **12. MS case study: Verena Wessely (Federal Bureau of Anti-Corruption, Austria)**

VW talked about the advantages offered by SIENA (Secure Information Exchange Network Application) which supports exchange of operational and strategic crime related information between Member States, Europol and Third Parties. VW presented a scheduled project within the EU Programme "Prevention of and Fight against Crime" 2007-2013, aiming at enhancing the communication with Europol, increasing the exchange of information via SIENA between executive forces and public authorities, extending SIENA to Member States' competent authorities, establishing user access to this system, enhancing the communication between expert communities. VW mentioned that her service had developed best practice and use of social media concerning corruption and would discuss back home the possibility of uploading it on extranet.

### **13. MS case study: Karin Burger (Customs, The Netherlands)**

KB mentioned the social media activities implemented by the Dutch Tax and Customs Administration, which implies listening and interacting with citizens. The social media strategy addressing citizens consists in informing, creating awareness and influencing behaviour. By using Facebook and Twitter, the Customs want for example to quickly answer travellers' questions on travellers' baggage quickly in a way that suits them. To engage in social business, the Customs will channel strategy services, extend online use for internet buyers target group, mix corporate message in with current online mix.

AH and AB thanked Members, and noted this had been a very busy year for OAFCN members, as illustrated by the numerous MS presentations of the day. This had been the meeting where more Members' initiatives were presented than in recent years. They reiterated the willingness of OLAF to continue closely working with OAFCN members in stepping-up the communication on anti-fraud matters.