

## THE ROLE OF INFORMATION PROVISION IN IMPROVING FRAUD PREVENTION

Before describing how a well-organised information policy can contribute to fraud prevention it is worth looking at the information policy of the Belgian Customs and Excise Administration in the context of overall communication policy.

The communication policy of any organisation, and particularly that of the Administration, is dictated by general policy. Because the Customs and Excise Administration is a government body, its outlook is influenced by what goes on around it - at international, European and national level. In addition, Community law determines much of what European customs administrations do. The policy statement of the Belgian Government outlines the themes for the coming term, and the Belgian customs, as part of the Federal Public Finance Service (FOD), has to work within this framework.

In addition to the federal policy statement, which, in the area of communication, focuses primarily on implementing e-government, the policy missions of the Federal Public Finance Service and the Customs and Excise Administration are largely responsible for shaping its communication policy.

I think it is therefore useful to reproduce both policy statements to give a clear picture of the parameters within which communication policy can operate.

### 1. GENERAL MISSION STATEMENT OF THE FEDERAL PUBLIC FINANCE SERVICE

*The mission and vision set out as part of the management plan are presented below.*

*Running a modern state means satisfying collective needs. The main task of the Federal Public Finance Service is to collect and manage a large proportion of the financial resources needed to satisfy these needs.*

*The principle of Parliamentary approval for taxation is one of the fundamental tenets of democracy. By accepting taxation, the citizens demonstrate their desire to live in a society that is mutually supportive. The Federal Public Finance Service strives to collect these taxes fairly and correctly, which means ensuring that every taxpayer pays the tax legally required of him. No more and no less.*

*The Federal Public Finance Service is also responsible, through the Treasury, for ensuring a balance between the revenue and expenditure of the Federal State. It does so by finding financial resources, through borrowing, to offset deficits, and/or by investing surpluses. As part of its mission it must also carefully and accurately execute payments under the heading of general expenditure, particularly the salaries of State employees and tax refunds.*

*The tasks of the Treasury also include extensive European and international responsibilities in the economic, financial and monetary field.*

*The Federal Public Finance Service also assumes other important tasks of public interest. It maintains the public property records (Patrimoniumdocumentatie), thus helping to ensure legal certainty, particularly in legal transactions involving goods. When checks are carried out on the flow of goods, the Federal Public Finance Service contributes to the protection of*

public health, the environment and the safety of people and goods, and particularly the fight against illegal trafficking and terrorism.

The Federal Public Finance Service's mission revolves around the delicate balance between the rights which the law extends to citizens and the obligations it imposes on them. This is at the heart of its mission. Seen in this light, the Federal Public Finance Service must rise to the challenges facing a modern administration that has to keep pace with changes in society, the economy and information and communication technologies.

In line with its continuing commitment to public service, the Federal Public Finance Service applies and guarantees rigour and professionalism in its core activities. It does so, on the one hand, by developing new working methods that are more efficient and more responsive to the needs of the public and, on the other, by fostering a new management culture that places more responsibility on its staff.

Whether or not it succeeds in its task will depend on the Federal Public Finance Service's ability to motivate its staff to pursue the quality and service objectives, particularly by constantly improving the standard of its employees in the most appropriate way.

By fulfilling the legitimate expectations of the public, the Federal Public Finance Service hopes to build a relationship of trust with the citizens to win their support for taxes and ensure that everyone fulfils their obligations by complying fully with the law.

## **2. GENERAL MISSION STATEMENT OF THE CUSTOMS AND EXCISE ADMINISTRATION**

### **We intend to**

make a fundamental contribution to promoting the fiscal, economic and social interests of Belgium and the European Union as they relate to:

- the transport, manufacture, processing and possession of customs and excise goods;
- other regulations connected with this core business.

### **We shall do this by**

- correctly collecting the taxes for which we are responsible;
- participating in the implementation of measures to protect and stimulate the European market;
- participating in the implementation of measures to protect the public in the field of health, environment and safety;
- ensuring the correct application of the regulations and detecting and combating fraud;
- advising those with political, administrative and economic responsibilities;
- serving the public, with due regard for their legitimate interests.

### **We stand for**

- professionalism;
- fairness;
- respect.

in our relations with the public, taxpayers and firms.

- a sense of common identity and group loyalty;
- team spirit;

- *personal development for our staff.*

### **3. MISSION STATEMENT OF THE COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE OF THE CUSTOMS AND EXCISE ADMINISTRATION**

#### ***We intend to***

*contribute to the provision of a general public service and to the personal and professional development of the staff by implementing a communication plan.*

*We will do this by means of an integrated approach to communications:*

*internally:*

- *by providing information and developing our own house style;*

*externally:*

- *by providing information to clients, partners, economic operators, the general public and the media;*

- *by encouraging compliance on the part of economic operators;*

- *by promoting a positive image to the outside world.*

#### ***We shall do this***

*internally:*

- *by, for example, publishing our own newsletter;*

- *by developing standard letters;*

- *by supporting initiatives to promote the esprit de corps.*

*externally:*

- *by producing an annual report for our clients and partners;*

- *by providing specific information to certain economic operators, in the form of leaflets;*

- *by providing general information to our non-professional customers;*

- *by responding to the information needs of the media;*

- *by encouraging cooperation through consultation;*

- *by supporting activities to improve the organisation's image.*

#### ***We believe in***

*courtesy towards our internal customers in a climate of trust that allows everyone to develop their personal and professional potential;*

*mutual cooperation with our clients and partners based on a proactive approach and targeted support in achieving social goals through collective action;*

*providing a high-quality, efficient and effective service to all our users, within the limits of the law and what is economically and technologically feasible.*

On the basis of the two policy statements we now need to work out what the priorities of the Belgian Customs and Excise Administration's communication policy are to be.

For the purpose of implementing this policy, two very important principles stand out, in my view. The first is the principle of subsidiarity. Corporate communication should be at the level of the entire organisation. Lower down in the organisation the principle of subsidiarity applies, and communication is best left to the level at which it is most effective. In the administration, which should be regarded as a business unit, people communicate best with specific messages tailored to the target groups.

The second principle is that all of an organisation's communication activities should be integrated. External communication has repercussions on the behaviour of the staff, and vice versa.

The fact that this policy is also service-oriented and customer-centred - meaning that compliance is encouraged - has the advantage that communication policy can derive its own mission statement from this.

A second important aspect of cooperation is promoting compliance. This has very significant implications for the provision of information about fraud prevention, because it is based on the one hand on the importance of prevention, so that essential resources are used for genuine fraud prevention, and, on the other hand, on repression as a means of deterring potential offenders.

One aspect of this information policy on fraud prevention involves presenting an account of activities (the annual report), but another even more important one is responding to the information requirements of the media.

Information is provided primarily after seizures are made. This also helps to enhance the organisation's image, not only for the officials involved in investigations, but also in the eyes of the general public.

We must try to strike a delicate balance here between the public's right to obtain information through the media and the confidentiality of the investigations, which is intended to protect the rights of those involved, and particularly the suspects' rights of defence. We must be very careful when weighing these principles against each other, and both the media and the authorities involved must show proper respect for each other's apparently conflicting objectives. Correct and effective information provision thus depends on a good understanding between the communication partners.

It is clear from the foregoing that information provision is not essential to better fraud prevention, but it is an important pre-condition for justifying and implementing such a policy. In view of the Community law that partly forms the basis of European fraud prevention, OLAF's initiative for this round table conference is to be welcomed.

I therefore wish it every success.