

Follow the money: OLAF and European anti-corruption and police oversight bodies call for transparency of financial transactions

Cash bribes and money laundering schemes can be a goldmine for criminals, allowing them to escape prosecution while taxpayers pick up the tab. With a growing amount of transnational cases, the systematic and swift sharing of financial information can be key to enforcers solving investigations and bringing offenders to justice. Shedding light on financial transactions and promoting the exchange of information is one of main points of the "Riga Declaration", adopted today by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and 52 other European anti-corruption and police oversight bodies.

Gathered in the Latvian capital (15-17 November), the members of the general assembly of EPAC/EACN adopted the Declaration, signed by its President, OLAF's Director-General, Giovanni Kessler, and by the Deputy-Director of the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB), Janis Roze.

In the spirit of previous EPAC/EACN agreements, the Riga Declaration signatories:

- committed to developing a shared tool for the self-evaluation of Police Oversight Bodies;
- called for transparency of financial transactions by promoting the disclosure of information on the beneficial ownership registers on companies and business-related trusts;
- on the basis of the results of EPAC/EACN Working Groups focusing on fighting fraud in the healthcare sector, members further called for the adoption of national policy plans to fight corruption in the healthcare system, based on the analysis of the specific weaknesses and vulnerabilities of that system and taking into account the country's economic and cultural conditions; they also called for greater transparency and effective administrative control in the management of the public healthcare system, mainly with regard to the allocation and use of public resources, the conclusion of public-private partnerships, the involvement of the medical and pharmaceutical industry and the use of the health insurance system.

OLAF Director-General Giovanni Kessler highlighted that *"EPAC/ EACN helps overcome the current challenges in fighting crime with national means". "Through our Network, we share best practices, discuss problems and support mutual learning."*

The meeting also saw the election of a new President of the EPAC/EACN network, Andreas Wieselthaler, director of the Austrian anti-corruption authority BAK. OLAF's Director-General, Giovanni Kessler, who has been President of the network for the past four years and whose work was praised during the meeting, stated *"it has been a pleasure to preside over this network. I congratulate Mr. Wieselthaler and I am pleased to pass-on the torch after four successful years of collaboration. OLAF will continue its committed work towards meeting the EPAC/EACN goals and implementing the Riga Declaration"*.

Background:

The European Partners Against Corruption and the European Contact-point Network against corruption (EPAC/EACN) is a high-level European network of anti-corruption practitioners, composed of more than 70 organisations. EPAC was initiated in 2001 under the auspices of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union and subsequently established in 2004. EACN was formally established in 2008 based on the existing structures of EPAC. OLAF is a member of both EPAC/EACN and its Director-General, Mr Giovanni Kessler, has been its President since 2012.

The signature of the [Riga Declaration](#) took place in the context of the 16th Annual Professional Conference of the EPAC/EACN being held from the 15 to 17 November in Riga, Latvia.

OLAF mission, mandate and competences

OLAF's mission is to detect, investigate and stop fraud with EU funds.

OLAF fulfils its mission by:

- carrying out independent investigations into fraud and corruption involving EU funds, so as to ensure that all EU taxpayers' money reaches projects that can create jobs and growth in Europe;
- contributing to strengthening citizens' trust in the EU Institutions by investigating serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU Institutions;
- developing a sound EU anti-fraud policy.

In its independent investigative function, OLAF can investigate matters relating to fraud, corruption and other offences affecting the EU financial interests concerning:

- all EU expenditure: the main spending categories are Structural Funds, agricultural policy and rural development funds, direct expenditure and external aid;
- some areas of EU revenue, mainly customs duties;
- suspicions of serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU institutions.

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