

OLAF and WCO strengthen cooperation to tackle customs fraud

Customs fraud can have a significant impact on the EU budget, and protecting this important revenue stream is a key part of the work of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). A new cooperation agreement with the World Customs Organization (WCO), signed on 7 June by OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä and WCO Secretary General Kunio Mikuriya, will strengthen the collaboration between the two bodies and strengthen OLAF's ability to tackle the fraudsters.

The so-called Administrative Cooperation Arrangement, which widens a previous agreement from 2003, focuses on both operational cooperation and information sharing. The 2003 arrangement between the WCO and OLAF covered only the exchange of information on tobacco seizures. The new agreement will see the exchange of information expanded to cover a wider range of fraudulent activity (counterfeiting, illicit trade in protected species, etc).

It will also help the two bodies to work more closely and effectively together on joint operations in the field. OLAF and respective members of the WCO - customs administrations worldwide - will now have access to non-personal data on a larger set of customs fraud cases shared by their counterparts in the EU Member States. This significantly simplifies the sharing of information among customs administrations as it will now be automatically replicated in their different databases and IT systems.

OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä said: *"OLAF and the WCO have nearly 20 years' experience of working together against tobacco smugglers and counterfeiters. I am delighted that we have reached this new arrangement to extend this collaboration to other major areas of fraud, including the illegal trade in endangered species. I am sure our already extremely successful partnership will go from strength-to-strength with this new arrangement, to the benefit of everyone."*

WCO Secretary General Dr. Kunio Mikuriya said: *"This agreement is a testimony of the long lasting cooperation between the WCO and OLAF and demonstrates the effectiveness of a coordinated approach to combat fraudulent activities. Customs administrations will greatly benefit from effective sharing of information using proven technologies. I am also looking forward to an even more enhanced collaboration with regards to joint field operations, especially during this time of global crisis."*

OLAF and the WCO frequently cooperate at the operational level, most recently in WCO-led operations [against illegal trafficking linked to the COVID-19 pandemic](#) and [illegal shipments of waste](#) or others coordinated by OLAF on [counterfeit hygiene products](#) and

[car parts](#). These successful operations actions largely contributed not only to the protection of EU budget but also that of our environment and safety of consumers.

The new arrangement builds on [last year's agreement to link the main databases](#) of the two anti-fraud bodies, the WCO's Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) database and the Customs Information System (CIS+) of OLAF.

Background:

The World Customs Organization is an independent intergovernmental body whose mission is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations. Today, the WCO represents 183 Customs administrations across the globe that collectively process approximately 98% of world trade. As the global centre of Customs expertise, the WCO is the only international organization with competence in Customs matters and can rightly call itself the voice of the international Customs community.

The Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) is a WCO's database of seizures and offences required for the analysis of illicit trafficking in the various areas of customs' competence. It allows users, among other things, to mine data in order to help define strategies, prepare risk indicators and identify trends in order to better tackle tobacco smuggling.

The Customs Information System (CIS) is part of the Anti-Fraud Information System (AFIS) managed by OLAF and allows the designated competent authorities in each of the EU's Member States to exchange, store and share information, boosting cooperation between the various national authorities and improving control procedures.

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.

Once OLAF has completed its investigation, it is for the competent EU and national authorities to examine and decide on the follow-up of OLAF's recommendations. All persons concerned are presumed to be innocent until proven guilty in a competent national or EU court of law.

For further details:

Jana CAPPELLO
Spokesperson
European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)
Phone: +32 2 29 85549
E-mail: olaf-media@ec.europa.eu
http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud



Chris JONES
Deputy Spokesperson
European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)
+32 2 29 91606
olaf-media@ec.europa.eu
http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud

