

Round table

First of all I would like to express my deeply felt appreciation to OLAF for organising this round table focusing on the role of communication as a tool for fraud prevention.

OLAF's work makes a key contribution to the task of ensuring that the Community budget is transparent and secure, protecting the EU's financial interests and combating fraud, corruption and all other types of illegal activity .

As an MEP and a Member of the EP's Committee on Budgets, I am convinced that fighting fraud against the Community budget is one of the foremost political concerns both of the European Commission and of the European Parliament .

The perpetrators of fraud against the EU's financial interests must be prosecuted jointly and effectively by all the EU Member States. This is the task of the European institutions and it is also what people expect from Europe. And it is important to make people aware of what is being done, at European level, to uphold the law.

Organised crime, which according to police intelligence is the main force behind large-scale fraud, is constantly on the look-out for ways of escaping detection. OLAF must therefore be given all the necessary resources so that it can wage this difficult battle with the right weapons. Within the Committee on Budgetary Control the European Socialists Group has pressed for more appropriate measures in the struggle for law enforcement, calling for harmonisation of individual Member States' administrative practices, highlighting the fact that only a small proportion of the targets of the national investigation and inspection departments are geared to the fight against fraud and urging Member States to review their priorities in this area.

In 1999 the European Commission announced a zero tolerance policy with regard to fraud and corruption, but in the field of the fight against irregularities rules and regulations have been adopted that are often contradictory, giving rise in my view to conflicts of jurisdiction.

But the fight against fraud must surely be pursued on other fronts, not just by conducting investigations. What is needed is for society in general to be made aware of the damage done by fraud and the danger it represents, and this is a task for the media.

The alarm sounded by the media through a series of news reports on specific types of offence can trigger a strong reaction among public opinion, which is often followed by an institutional response in the form of new prevention policies or new and stricter penalties. A kind of chain reaction can take place, linking together the media, public opinion and the institutional sector.

The type of offence we are dealing with here, namely fraud, is clearly an issue of concern to society as a whole and a threat both to our own national budgets and to the Community budget. The media therefore have a role to play, if not in terms of prevention, at least in encouraging the dissemination of a culture of respect for the law by highlighting the damage which fraudulent activities cause to citizens.

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