

**SPEECH**  
**by Ion Iliescu, President of Romania,**  
**to the seminar for the communicators of the European Union's Anti-Fraud**  
**Office**  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The fact that this seminar is being held in Romania is attributable to the progress being made by the country in integrating into the structures of the European Union and to the need for the adoption of the Community *acquis* to go hand in hand with the introduction of EU procedures in numerous fields, ensuring in particular that European funds, which come from the public purse, are spent in a lawful and efficient manner.

Within the institutional framework of the European Union, OLAF (the European Anti-Fraud Office) plays an extremely important role because of the tasks assigned to it. Romania's cooperation with OLAF is in its infancy, and the fact that, thanks to the efforts of both parties, such an event as today's is taking place in Bucharest can be regarded as evidence of the country's resolute determination to combat all forms of fraud involving domestic and European public funds, acts of corruption, tax avoidance and, generally speaking, any violations of the law, regardless of the political or social position of the perpetrators.

Since those responsible in the European Union are aware of how important this campaign is, they are supporting Romania and the institutions of the Romanian State in our efforts to create an appropriate legislative structure, to prepare specialists for the fight against fraud and to set up operational and credible control bodies.

A very wide variety of projects are being implemented with various partners, more often than not in different geographical areas and at quite different intervals. This complexity offers many opportunities for fraud. If we come to regard this essentially objective situation as our destiny, we will end up viewing fraud as an everyday occurrence. This would be the worst possible thing that could happen.

Fraud involving the public purse is all the more reprehensible, and must be severely punished, in that it cannot take place other than with the involvement of politicians and public officials, i.e. those who are entrusted essentially with defending and promoting the public interest. Their dishonesty undermines trust in the State, in the country's institutions and in democracy.

Whereas, from the point of view of the media, tackling corruption and fraud can, in general, be anonymous since more often than not it falls well short of being spectacular in a world of media spectacle, acts of fraud are more spectacular and attract greater media exposure. This may give the false impression that the State and its institutions are powerless or, more seriously, may foster the idea that efforts to prevent fraud are pointless or impossible.

These realities have made it necessary to organise within the framework of OLAF and similar agencies in the Member States and the candidate countries a number of structures specialised in public communication and capable of interacting coherently and at all times with public opinion and with the media. An honest and professional relationship with the press becomes extremely important for the creation of a public culture of honesty and transparency in the disbursement of public money.

People must be aware of the danger posed by unlawful activities as well as by activities that result in the misappropriation and waste of taxpayers' money. Such fraud means greater poverty as well as fewer and lower-quality public services and is harmful to the legitimate interests of society and its members.

It is our duty, the duty of all of us, to help the people understand that, alongside rights and freedoms, they have legal and constitutional obligations, that it is in their interests and in the interests of society that fraudulent acts should be severely punished, and that they should not become accomplices, including as a result of passivity or non-involvement, in such anti-social behaviour.

I welcome the fact that Romania has already set up a kind of public communications unit within the Government's Control Department. It is important that, together with other specialists in the field, it devises and develops a number of information and awareness-raising campaigns concerning fraud involving Community funds and, in particular, that it gauges their public impact.

I would like to stress that, regardless of the obstacles we face, the institutions of the Romanian State and I personally are most concerned with ensuring respect for the laws and interests of our society as well as for European norms and with punishing those guilty of acts of corruption or fraud.

The Romanian authorities are absolutely determined to combat such kinds of fraud and, at the same time, to inform the European institutions and public opinion of the results obtained.

Transparency is nowadays an efficient weapon in stamping out corruption and fraud of any kind involving public funds. The existence of transparent procedures that are the same for everyone, the disappearance of those conditions that have paved the way for immunity and impunity in the case of many offenders, and the effective application of the principle whereby "no one is ever above the law" are all arguments for continuing your activities within the control machinery, for supporting moves to give individuals responsibility and for creating a partnership between individuals and institutions, including the Government's Control Department as well as active cooperation with Community institutions, including OLAF, with a view to clamping down tightly on all acts of fraud.

I wish you success in your work and can assure you that Romania will respect all the undertakings it has given to its European partners.