

OLAF strengthens investigative cooperation with partner enlargement countries

Investigators, police officers, civil servants and financial experts from 11 Enlargement and Eastern Partnership countries met in Tirana on 1-3 June at the annual conference of Anti-Fraud Coordination Services (AFCOS), organised by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).

The event, hosted by the Albanian AFCOS and opened by Albanian Deputy Minister of Finance Erjon Luci and the EU Ambassador Romana Vlahutin, brought together anti-fraud experts keen to exchange best practices and enhance practical cooperation on all aspects of fighting fraud affecting the financial interests of the European Union. The focus of this year's conference, which was chaired by OLAF policy Director Margarete Hofmann was on investigative cooperation and the reporting of irregularities. OLAF experts updated participants on the latest EU policy and legislative developments relevant to the fight against fraud and advised on the role of EU Delegations in ensuring EU funds do not fall into the hands of fraudsters. As national authorities are in the frontline of fighting fraud and corruption, an important point of the agenda addressed the need for developing national anti-fraud strategies.

"To be able to effectively protect and promote public interest and proper use of EU funds, there has to be a combination of political will, institutional capacity and public transparency that can provide solid guarantees to our citizens for the use of their tax money," EU Ambassador Romana Vlahutin said.

Participants came from EU candidate as well as potential candidate countries, i.e. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. Representatives from Austria were also present. For the first time, representatives of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia attended as observers. These Eastern Partnership countries recently concluded Association Agreements with the EU, which contain substantial anti-fraud provisions aimed at protecting the EU budget.

Anti-Fraud Coordination Services take an active role in the implementation of comprehensive anti-fraud strategies at national level, identifying possible irregularities at national level in relation to the management of the EU funds, and in effectively safeguarding the EU budget.

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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