

16th OAFCN Meeting, 13th October 2009, Brussels

1. Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted with no changes.

2. Approval of the Minutes of the 15th OAFCN Meeting, Brussels, 8th May 2009

The minutes were approved and will be published on the website.

3. OLAF's 10th anniversary

Mr. Alessandro Buttice (AB) summarised the OLAF 10th Anniversary Conference which took place on 12 October 2009 and thanked the 27 OAFCN members who represented their national delegations. He recalled the context of the office's origins and he underlined the office's importance as well as the success it has achieved so far.

AB welcomed Ms. Amy BURNETT from DG TAXUD, as, like many OAFCN colleagues from the Customs already know, DG TAXUD has also created a network similar to the OAFCN.

As far as the discussion on the future of OLAF is concerned, AB stressed that this will be a political decision of the legislators: of course OLAF's Director-General can give advice, but our duty is to respect the law.

He also informed the members that in November he will participate in a meeting, organised by the World Bank in Qatar, in order to share the OAFCN's experience.

Mr. Paul Mathews (HM Revenue & Customs, UK) reiterated comments made by the MEP Dr. Ingeborg Gräßle at the 10th Anniversary Conference, that improvements must be made on the number of convictions per year.

AB said that OLAF must get closer to the public, for its work is not known widely by the general public. Information must be made available through various media of communication.

Mr. Carlo Felice Corsetti (CFC) (Giornalisti Uffici Stampa, Italy), added that it is important to communicate with the public not only through the TV fiction project but also through cinema, by producing a film 100% focused on OLAF activities. He informed the audience that Italian producers are interested, and he invited any other colleague who is interested to come forward.

Mr. Herwig Heller (Federal Ministry of Finance, Austria) encouraged OLAF to launch a political discussion on anti-fraud, perhaps even by having a 'financial interests day' like the European Parliament's 'piracy day' in order to get national parliaments talking about the subject.

Mr. Igoris Krzeckovskis, (FCIS - Ministry of Interior, Lithuania) regretted the lack of information on AFCOS during the Conference and he suggested focusing on the last AFCOS Roundtable.

AB added the AFCOS Roundtable to the last point of the agenda (AOB). He also emphasised that OLAF's "tricky task" is to communicate the "strange animal" that is OLAF, to the external world, because its activities are not always heard of outside the Brussels village.

Transparency does not simply mean publishing information and documents on the website, but a clear and understandable message needs to be conveyed. OLAF has an important role to play in this as it can act as the bridge to the public needed to ensure a better understanding of the anti-fraud work that the EU does.

Mr. David Jones (Serious Fraud Office, UK) remarked that the Network's incremental achievements ought to be recognised and he stated that OAFCN has deserved its success thanks to its creator, Alessandro Buttice.

AB welcomed Mr. Max Strotmann, Spokesman for VP Kallas, thanked him for his support of the OAFCN since its creation and he gave him the floor.

Mr. Strotmann commented on the uniqueness and achievements of OLAF and the OAFCN in the last ten years. The Network is vital to the work of OLAF and is thus responsible for its success. He suggested that this could perhaps be exported to other policy areas. He said that sometimes the Member States fear that Europe is invading their national areas of competency, but he underlined that both OLAF and the Member States are key elements in the common fight against fraud and it is necessary for them to work closely.

AB reiterated the importance of raising awareness not on OLAF, but on anti-fraud issues, and the impact that fraud has on our everyday lives and what Europe is doing to combat fraud and irregularities.

4. OLAF TV fiction project: latest developments

AB presented the latest developments on the TV fiction project and he recalled that there is EU funding for this kind of project, especially if we can demonstrate the pedagogical or training function of such an initiative (e.g. HERCULE).

AB revealed he has been in touch with some TV production companies: he has been in contact with Mr. Peter Hajek, founding father of the television series "Commissioner Rex". But he has also been in contact with an Italian film company, Cristaldi Films: AB and CFC met in Rome with the head of the company who is really enthusiastic about the project. AB informed us that the French Customs promised that in the next season of their TV series, there will be an episode on OLAF. AB requested that the Network members cooperate with the production companies should they be contacted by them.

Mr. Gennaro Vecchione (Guardia di Finanza Community Anti-Fraud section, Italy), commented that OLAF may be 10 years old, but it is still young. It is still growing and developing in its role. He added that 40 OLAF investigations have taken place in Italy, and that it might be useful for each member of the Network to be informed on the achievements of the other members in order to broaden communication within the Network and to avoid the information remaining at national level.

AB agreed that operational activity must be highlighted to the other members, especially positive feedback, but he said that on the OLAF website only OLAF-related news can be published. He also added that the new OAFCN website can offer new perspectives, and then gave the floor to the OLAF Webmaster, Ms. Olga Ferreira.

5. The new OAFCN website

Ms. Olga Ferreira presented the new beta version OAFCN website. It uses Web 2.0 technology and has secured access. The main features are as follows:

- New articles are presented in the centre of the page, with rotating images.
- Search engine
- Possibility for subscribing to RSS feeds
- Sitemap
- Poll
- Calendar
- Possibility to create and edit content (forum, blog, images, videos, publications)
- Archives
- Members' list (not necessarily OAFCN members, but members of the site – with photo, e-mail, and description of which groups a member is subscribed to)
- List of members currently online
- Popular tags – a group of words of the most popular terms will be displayed in various sizes according to popularity.
- Legal Disclaimer

The website has a provisional launch date for late 2009. OLAF will supply content, however OAFCN members are strongly encouraged to contribute. Olga Ferreira can be contacted for further information regarding the website launch, or if OAFCN members have any suggestions about the site.

AB reminded OAFCN members that they will be responsible for content published on the website: information should therefore be carefully considered prior to publication.

6. "Mastering the Experience of OLAF's Communications Network and the New European Models of Partnership with the Judicial Power" and "OLAF Facing the European Citizens"- Two projects by the Bulgarian Club of Journalists Against Corruption (BCJAC) within the OAFCN

Ms. Reneta Nikolova (Bulgarian Club of Journalists Against Corruption, Bulgaria) informed the Network about the Closing Conference (Sofia, 21/7/2009), the joint project of the BCJAC and the Bulgarian Prosecutor's Office, entitled "Mastering the experience of the OAFCN and the new EU models of partnership with the judicial power". Ms. Nikolova said the main purpose of the project, launched in September 2008, was to enhance the capacity of the BCJAC in its interaction with the judicial power by complimenting the Prosecutor's Office. The main point was mastering and applying the communication experience of OLAF by putting an emphasis on audio-visual communication. The project was realised within the framework of the Operational Programme "Administrative Capacity" (OPAC). At the press conference it was announced that, on the basis of this experience, a new project will be started concerning the role and importance of international co-operation in fighting fraud and the misuse of European funds, financed by the Hercule II Programme. The new project entitled "OLAF facing the European citizens" started on 1 September 2009. The shooting of the first documentary film will take place in Germany and the Czech Republic, after which the first seminar in Sofia will be organised for 10 January 2010. Project partners of the JAC Club are the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria, Bulgaria's Ministry of Interior, German ZKA, Customs Offices of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, The General Prosecutor's Office of the Slovak Republic, and Italy's Guardia di Finanza. The project will continue for 9 months and has to conclude by 31 May 2010.

Mr. Wolfgang Schmitz (Zollkriminalamt, Germany) said the OAFCN should support international cooperation through its work. Concrete steps have been taken, in that Germany and the Czech Republic are starting with film production this month, other Member States are also involved (Italy, Bulgaria...) He stressed that they were producing concrete results.

AB congratulated the project's actors for having been such excellent ambassadors for the Network and he added that this project was the evidence that debate in the Network is also possible without Brussels. AB said we should stimulate a culture of having a spokesperson in each prosecutor's office, as they do in Germany, to facilitate communication to the public.

Ms. Cinthia Pinotti (Corte dei Conti, Italy) agreed with AB, each prosecutors' office in Italy has a representative (in 2006 a law was passed which meant that only the chief prosecutor should have relations with the media – though this was for a while ignored). A balance must be struck between the right of information for the public and the right of privacy/protection during defence for those prosecuted. At the moment there is a lack of a culture of communication, however it must be appropriate.

AB concluded by saying the Network can make an important contribution and that this could be the theme of a forthcoming seminar.

7. Operation DIABOLO II: latest developments and possible messages to the media

Mr. Thierry Henne (TH) presented the provisional results of the joint customs operation DIABOLO II, which is about to conclude (21 October). The final results should be made public in January 2010, probably in Japan, with perhaps a press release launch in Brussels to coincide with this.

TH recalled the context of this operation: the 7th ASEM (Asia Europe Meeting - Yokohama, 2007) concluded it was important to coordinate the fight against fraud and use advanced technology to counteract terrorism and organised crime (based on the success of Diabolo I), and in May 2008 OLAF was chosen as the unique coordinator of the operation. In March 2009, the OLAF conference on the mutual administrative assistance in customs matters within the ASEM framework was held. Following this, the 3rd World Group ASEM met in Budapest in April: from Asia, Brunei, China and India desisted at the last minute; from the EU the 27 Member States were present, as well as Europol and Interpol. This was conceived exclusively as a maritime operation: inspection of sea containers through Asian ports discharged into EU ports either directly or through transshipment. Further actions and results were presented to the Network, underlining the real cooperation experienced with the Asian authorities.

TH and AB called on the Network to cooperate in communicating on this operation. For OLAF it is necessary to have a mutual exchange of operational information within the Network. OLAF can then provide more detailed information on national contact points for the operation.

AB appealed to Network members to contact their national operational colleagues to collect the material which can be used for a press release in January 2010. Items could include: photographs of good quality, videos, articles (translated into languages used for the press release). The audiovisual service of the Commission can potentially help.

AB informed the Network members that Jörg Wojahn and Pascale Foujols will be the OLAF contact points to collect the material. He added that the information is under embargo so as not to compromise the operation and to maximise the impact of the press release for January

2010. Members should start collecting information and pictures for the press release. It is also important that the pictures are of professional standard and free from copyright.

Mr. Wolfgang Schmitz (Zollkriminalamt, Germany) proposed a common press conference to present the results of Diabolo II in Brussels with Commissioners present.

Ms. Sallamaari Repo (Finnish Customs) suggested a national aspect to the press release for the press in Finland, for it to be of any importance to national media.

AB agreed there should be a national aspect added for the respective national media and proposed parallel conferences in Brussels and in the Member States: articles should centre on the local work but be mentioned in a wider European context.

Angel Gonzalez De La Fuente (Agencia Tributaria, Spain) told of his experience in Spain where customs news shown on television always carries explanations from customs" officers.

OAFNCN members expressed their willingness to engage and start collecting information and material of high quality and free from copyright in due time from their operational colleagues.

8. Jury's decision and Ceremony of the Prize "Journalism: Press officer of the Year" – edition 2009, Section "Communicating the EU"

CFC read out a statement on the above prize won by Alessandro Buttice "for his continuing commitment to communicating the European Institutions and for his considerable professional achievements" against fraud and irregularities, while respecting the law and rights.

AB explained that he decided to donate the prize money to the IFJ's Safety Fund for supporting journalists who are the victims of violence because of their work. He wants to show OLAF's commitment towards the IFJ and show that they have the same objectives, i.e. investigating the truth. He added that there is a forum for discussion if any of the Network's members feel pressured by anyone due to their activities.

AB ended the point by thanking once again CFC, the IFJ and notably its General Secretary, Aidan White, for their press release¹ as well as all OAFNCN members and his staff to whom he dedicates the honorary prize.

9. 10th OAFNCN Training Seminar, 2010

AB recalled the context and success of the last OAFNCN seminars. Concerning the venue for the next seminar, he reminded members that in 2009 Italy and Poland were candidates, but as priority is given to new Member States, Italy gave way to Poland and was kept as a candidate for 2010. David Szeverenyi (DS) (Customs and Finance Guard, Hungary) said that Hungary would like to host the next OAFNCN seminar in Budapest, and would confirm this within one month. Italian colleagues confirmed their intention to host the seminar in Rome, but they decided to once more be a reserve host country.

Joannes Thuy (Eurojust) and Gerald Hesztera (Europol) informed AB and all OAFNCN colleagues that they would be pleased to host the second annual meeting at the end of 2010 in

¹ <http://www.ifj.org/en/articles/europe-award-winner-donates-prize-money-to-ifj-safety-fund>

The Hague, in order to give members the opportunity to visit Europol and Eurojust. No objection was made to this proposal.

The following five topics were suggested and voted on by OAFCN members:

1. Press review techniques.
2. TV fiction and cinema production.
3. Comparison between different systems of judicial communication within the EU.
4. Secrecy of journalistic sources.
5. Pro-active media activity

The confirmed title for the OAFCN seminar in 2010 is "Proactive Media Strategies to promote EU-wide anti-fraud messages".

10. Debriefing on COCOLAF meeting and OAFCN presentation

AB informed the OAFCN members that he presented an update on the Network's activities during the last meeting of the Advisory Committee for the Coordination on Fraud Prevention (COCOLAF) which was held in Brussels on 1 October 2009.

11. Any other business

Mr. Igoris Krzeckovskis (FCIS - Ministry of Interior, Lithuania), informed OAFCN colleagues that the last AFCOS Roundtable took place in Budapest at the end of August. He expressed his regret at the lack of a European legal basis for AFCOS and suggested that maybe we should repeat the experience of 5 years ago.

DS said that OLAF created the basis and background for AFCOS activities, but the document has no legal power. He added that AFCOS should have an important role in explaining OLAF's role and activities to the Member States.

AB said that the Regulation refers to "competent authorities", and not Member States, but he would forward this demand to his colleague Lothar Kuhl, who is in charge of legal aspects within OLAF.

AB said he was very happy to participate in the AFCOS Roundtable in Budapest as he had the opportunity to meet other AFCOS participants who are not OAFCN members. He added that AFCOS remains a very important contact point within the Member States. Nevertheless, he also stressed the importance of an integral approach within the OAFCN in order to guarantee a plurality of the operational partners represented (AFCOS of course, but also Spokespersons and Communication Officers of the Police, Financial Police, Customs and Prosecutors' Offices).

OLAF 10th anniversary medals were distributed to all members.

End of Meeting