

17th OAFCN meeting, 7 May 2010, Brussels

1. Minute's silence

Mr Nicholas Ilett (NI) presided over a minute's silence in commemoration of OLAF's late Director-General, Franz-Hermann Brüner (FHB).

He then provided an overview of the current situation in OLAF, the foreseen timeline with regard to the recruitment of a new Director-General, as well as the importance he attaches to the OAFCN.

NI introduced the new Head of Unit "Spokesman, Communication and Public Relations" and OAFCN Chairman, Mr Pavel Bořkovec (PB).

The floor was given to Carlo Felice Corsetti (CFC) (Giornalisti Uffici Stampa, Italy) to pay tribute to FHB by presenting the chapter of a book entitled Guida all'Universo Comunicazione, written by Alessandro Butticié and dedicated to the memory of the late FHB. He added that a plaque will additionally be dedicated to FHB at the prize ceremony for Press Officer of the Year 2010.

2. Welcome note

PB welcomed new members to the Network. He thanked his predecessor, Alessandro Butticié, for his work, and Agnes Horvath, for covering during the interim period. He said he would welcome any input regarding future developments of the OAFCN Network.

3. Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted with 2 requested additions:

- a. The Hungarian delegation asked to present their new internet portal.
- b. The Italian delegation wished to give an overview of the work being done in Italy to involve universities in the fight against fraud.

4. Approval of the minutes of the 16th OAFCN meeting

The minutes were approved without amendment.

CFC described an OLAF TV fiction project initiative, saying that a well-known Italian producer had expressed an interest and was seeking 2 other willing participants from the Member States.

5. Framework of the Lisbon Treaty and its implications for OLAF and its OAFCN partners

Ms Andreea Staicu (AS) provided an overview of the implications of the Lisbon Treaty regarding the protection of the EU's financial interests. She said that, although there is no mention of OLAF in the Treaty, there is scope for developing relations with Europol, Eurojust and the future European Public Prosecutor's Office.

In view of the fact that national authorities will continue to coordinate their own activities in the fight against fraud, AS stressed the continued importance of cooperation between them and OLAF, namely through the exchange of best practice and communicating results.

Joannes Thuy (JT) (Eurojust) added that his organisation is already working towards the changes and reviewing the opportunities opened by the new Treaty.

6. OLAF's cooperation with the US regarding the Miami case

Austin Rowan (AR) informed the assembly of OLAF's efforts to fight cigarette smuggling into the EU, citing the Miami case as a primary example, and its effects on the EU such as losses to the EU budget.

AR stressed the role that cooperation with the relevant law enforcement agencies plays in fighting the problem of cigarette smuggling, as well as the importance of international agreements.

In order to build on EU–US cooperation, the late FHB wanted to see a conference that would bring together the two sides, which will now take place in September 2010 in Ireland.

AR concluded that this was a concrete example of how working together achieves results.

David Jones (DJ) (Serious Fraud Office, UK) enquired about how the case panned out in terms of media management, to which AR replied that his unit works closely with OLAF's communications unit for media relations and, if there is a political element, the Commissioner's cabinet is consulted.

Marco de Andreis (Agenzia delle Dogane, Italy) recalled that while the number of seizures is increasing, levels of smuggling are also on the rise. He queried how the public can be shown both sides of the statistics. AR noted that the criminal organisations are "trained" by every seizure and trends continuously change, but the seizures reflect that the law enforcement agencies are performing good work.

[7. Film 'OLAF – Facing the European Citizen'](#)

Reneta Nikolova (RN) (Bulgarian Club Journalists Against Corruption) introduced her project which has produced 2 films, both dedicated to OLAF's late Director-General, that track actions taken in the fight against fraud in 4 countries and highlight the significance of international cooperation with the coordination of OLAF. Both films were shown on Bulgarian television, will be available online, and were to be shown at the EU Open Day.

RN thanked all those involved with the project and making of the films and handed the floor to Wolfgang Schmitz (WS) (Zollkriminalamt, Germany). WS added comments on the aim of the project which involves raising public awareness and hopefully getting the films to be shown by other broadcasters and maybe even sent to Hollywood.

Gian Luca Berruti (GLB) (Guardia di Finanza, Italy) added that the OAFCN exists precisely to be able to form concrete projects such as this one.

[8. OLAF's new Fraud Notification System \(FNS\)](#)

Stefan Knolle (SK) talked the assembly through the development of the new system that has been set up to make reporting fraud easier and more effective. The current anonymous reporting system (OLAF's FREEPHONE) lacks efficiency, as most of the recorded messages are irrelevant.

SK compared the advantages of the FNS, an idea of the late FHB, concluding that the new internet-based system makes it easier for OLAF to filter irrelevant reporting, to encourage structured reporting and to safeguard the anonymity of those providing information. He also stated that the system allows two-way communication, not possible with the current FREEPHONE, and operates like a 'blind' letterbox whereby both parties can drop off messages. For OLAF investigators, this has the advantage of helping them better assess the credibility of anonymous reports, as well as making abuse of the system more difficult.

Some concerns were raised: SK himself admitted that public awareness of the system was an issue, but one that was being addressed via a specific campaign; WS recalled the difficulties that his organisation had with a FREEPHONE service, which was shut down after 3 years, mentioning that the receipt of irrelevant information was a significant problem; and Soren Pedersen (SP) (Europol) wondered how many staff would be required to effectively run such a system.

By way of response, SK stated that, after just 9 weeks, it was a bit early to reach specific conclusions, and that all possibilities to improve the system and how fraud is reported to OLAF are being looked at.

9. Development of relations with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

Renate Schroeder (RS) outlined the developments of the Ethical Journalism Initiative (EJI) since the 15th OAFCN meeting. She reminded the Network that the EJI focuses on creating dialogue and building bridges between journalists, anti-fraud services and civil society.

She highlighted the importance of investigative journalism, quality journalism and the notion of freedom of the press. RS also spoke highly of the IFJ's cooperation with networks such as the OAFCN.

She lamented the fact that in recent years there may not have been enough mutual cooperation and raised the possibility of looking at holding more investigative journalism seminars together.

RS said that the IFJ would be represented at the 10th seminar and called on the Network for proposals to promote dialogue.

10. Address by the new Commission Spokesperson for Taxation and Customs Union, Audit and Anti-fraud

Emer Traynor introduced herself to the members, explaining that, as the Commissioner who handles the dossier including anti-fraud has changed, the cabinet team changed accordingly. She concluded by saying that she looked forward to the Network's contributions and collaborative work.

11. Honorary OAFCN membership

DJ referred to his draft proposal calling for the establishment of a new OAFCN membership category, that of "Honorary Member", an idea first expressed to OLAF by JT.

The underlying idea of such a membership category would be to reward those who have made significant and exceptional contributions to the Network, and also to ensure that the possibility of such contribution is not lost in the future.

The members were asked to give a show of hands to approve the establishment of the new category and it was passed unanimously.

Gennaro Vecchione (GV) (Nucleo Guardia di Finanza Repressione Frodi Comunitarie, Italy) intervened, calling for a further category (in addition to this one proposed) of "Honorary President" for Heads of Unit at OLAF who had distinguished themselves through their work and leadership of the Network.

Michael Cassar (Police, Malta) said that Honorary Membership should be kept very prestigious and was doubtful of the need for, or benefits of, creating further categories.

PB suggested that this new proposal did not affect the vote previously carried out and that the establishment of further categories could be discussed at the 18th OAFCN meeting, once a paper detailing the new proposal had been prepared. JT then took the floor to nominate Alessandro Buttice as the first OAFCN Honorary Member – a proposal that was also unanimously approved by the members.

PB declared therefore that Alessandro Buttice becomes Honorary Member of the OAFCN.

12. OAFCN extranet site

Olga Ferreira (OLAF Webmaster) reminded the Network of the purpose and uses of the OAFCN extranet site. She said that only about 10 members had so far signed up and PB emphasised that the initiative cannot work without contributions from Members. DJ enquired about the possibility of receiving content notifications and PB replied that DG Informatics would have to be consulted on the feasibility of this.

Dávid Szeverényi (DS) (AFCOS, Hungary) was given the floor to present AFCOS' new Anti-Fraud and Irregularity Portal. He called for active contributions, on which the portal's success depends.

13. 10th OAFCN training seminar

PB presented the draft agenda for the next OAFCN training seminar in Budapest and explained the foreseen schedule. He called for proposals for case studies to be submitted, whilst also adding that 5 moderators would be needed for the event. He then gave the floor to DS who explained some of the programme's cultural activities.

GV was subsequently given the floor to give an overview of 2 initiatives that are being conducted by the Italian AFCOS at university level:

1. A post-graduate Master's programme looking at the management of European funds and the fight against fraud.
2. Programmes run by professional journalists on reporting and editing of articles on European subjects.

PB proposed that the topic be discussed in more depth at the next OAFCN meeting in The Hague, but that budgetary issues regarding external speakers would need to be looked into internally first.

14. 18th OAFCN meeting

SP and JT announced the dates – 9-10 December 2010 – and gave a general overview of what Europol and Eurojust had planned so far for the event. PB said that if anyone has proposals for items for the agenda they should be sent to Emily Fairless (EF) (acting OAFCN secretary).

15. EU Open Day 2010 with the involvement of the OAFCN

EF explained to the members the role of the EU Open Day, what OLAF, with the participation of the OAFCN, had planned as activities for the event, and how the day should generally proceed.

16. Any other business

GLB introduced a movie featuring the Guardia di Finanza related to the earthquake in Italy in 2009 entitled "Terremoto".

End of meeting