



EUROPEAN ANTI-FRAUD OFFICE

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More funds, better tools, faster implementation: Hercule III gets budget boost of almost half a million euro

X-ray scanners enabling Irish customs officials to seize cigarettes, counterfeit products, drugs and weapons, and sniffer dogs helping Greek customs uncover more than 250 million illegal cigarettes are just some of the Hercule-funded projects that show that small initiatives can deliver large benefits in the protection of European Union's financial interests. It is no wonder that Hercule, a financial programme dedicated to fighting fraud, corruption and any other illegal activities affecting the financial interests of the EU and managed by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), is growing in size, and popularity. With an increase of almost half a million euros, the new Work Programme for Hercule III will specifically reflect the growing interest of Member States' national and regional authorities in purchasing specialized equipment and in acquiring and training canine units. The European Commission has earmarked a total of 14.95 million euros for the implementation of the Hercule III Programme in 2017. The call for proposals will be launched later this Spring.

"The success of the Hercule Programme is attested by its tangible and concrete results. The additional funds available this year will enable Member State authorities to acquire innovative tools to ensure that fraudsters are caught and that taxpayers' money is protected," OLAF Director-General Giovanni Kessler said.

The European Commission will speed up the implementation of this year's Programme thanks to a new e-Grant system, which is expected to reduce the time between the submission of an application and the award of grant to a successful applicant. The new e-Grant application system will be made available as of May 2017 and also aims to create a faster and easier application process.

Additionally, as part of the Hercule III Program OLAF will cooperate with the European Police College (CEPOL) to organise specialized digital forensic training courses in the second half of 2017. The Programme will finance the development of a methodology to better collect information in order to measure the illicit tobacco trade from third countries into the European Union. In addition, a pilot study will be undertaken to examine possibilities to better use the data collected by the Commission under different legal instruments.

Background:

Further information for applicants is available on the website of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) who is managing the Hercule III programme on behalf of the European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/anti-fraud/policy/hercule_en

Hercule III is a financial programme specifically dedicated to fighting fraud, corruption and any other illegal activities affecting the financial interests of the EU. It provides for the collective procurement of specialised equipment and databases to be used by national law enforcement agencies and training for anti-fraud specialists. The programme covers the period 2014-2020 and will provide a total of EUR 104.9 million of support to Member States.

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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