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The Bureau for International Treasury Relations (ITR Bureau) is the Polish unit of the Anti-Fraud Co-ordination Service (AFCOS) responsible for co-ordination of anti-fraud activities. The office is the central contact point for the European Commission services as well as for Member States' services responsible for issues associated with the protection of European Union financial interests. It is the partner of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and is a participant in the system responsible for securing financial interests in Poland to which also belong the Government Anti-Fraud Plenipotentiary in charge of fighting against financial fraud affecting the Republic of Poland and the European Union as well as the Inter-Ministerial Anti-Fraud Unit (GAFU) responsible for the same tasks.

The main duties of the Government Plenipotentiary (these duties are currently being fulfilled by the General Inspector of Treasury Control, a Secretary of State in the Ministry of Finance), include initiation, coordination and execution of actions aimed at securing the financial interests of the Republic of Poland and the European Union. The Government Plenipotentiary is supported by the Inter-Ministerial GAFU Group. The Group consists of representatives of institutions and services responsible for securing the financial interests of the Republic of Poland and of the European Union. These are operational and investigative services and as such their activities are usually of a confidential nature, directed towards combating crime and irregularities. GAFU Group tasks include planning, coordination, monitoring and controlling activities undertaken by the appropriate government administration services as well as preparing proposals aimed at securing efficient information exchanges between these institutions. Employees of these services are required to keep confidential information obtained during the course of investigations due to non-disclosure clauses to which they are subject. They carry out operational activities and as such very often come into conflict with the need to communicate.

Institutional communication teams within the individual services are responsible for communicating with society. This obligation is carried out by means of pro-active information policies. These teams cooperate with mass-media on the basis of provisions contained in the Press Act as well as in the Access to Public Information Act. They operate under extreme time pressure, especially in regard to making available information associated with actions currently being carried out by operational services. Journalists are interested in news – something that happened today and is of a sensationalist nature.

Pro-active information policy means no more and no less than “coming forward with information”. The media play a very important role in carrying out this active communication with society. They in essence constitute a part of public opinion and, above all, have a very large influence on how this opinion is formed. They have a high level of social trust (in particular news services) and, what is very important, are able to reach a wide range of recipients and as such play the role of an intermediary in contacts with society. If we want to reach the widest possible group of recipients, we use the media as an excellent communication channel.

In carrying out pro-active information policies we must always know what we want to make available, how we want to achieve this and when is the best time to make such information available. The text of the information made available must also be very carefully prepared. Unconfirmed and false information cannot be made available under any circumstances. Our information must be interesting and contain a clear and truthful message.

By implementing such information policies, the organization has the chance of being the first source of information, even if such information is not beneficial for it. This gives way to the unquestioned ability to offer an initial interpretation of the events as well as to define the directions and means in which such information will be made available. It allows anyone to present his point of view. In addition, thanks to actively making information available, there exists the possibility of creating a climate of disregard for fraud and financial crimes against the Polish and EU budget among recipients. It also clearly shows to society that services that are looking after safe use of Community funds are working and that criminal activities will be discovered and punished.

Active communication with society also gives the opportunity for society to become better acquainted with the work of any given organization. An example may be the documentary series entitled “Granice” [*Frontiers*] currently being produced by TVN Television in cooperation with the Public Communications Office of the Ministry of Finance and the spokesmen of customs chambers. This program explains to society the nature of the work done by the Customs Service and Border Guard thus helping to increase the credibility and authority of these services. It constitutes a form of combating crime and fraud. The large number of people watching this TV programme allows one to assume that social acceptance for the work of customs officers and social awareness of the role they play in securing the financial interests of Poland and the EU is increasing. A clear sign of this process is the fact that smuggling dropped significantly after the airing of the series’ first edition.

Of course a conflict between the media seeking information and public services protecting finances against fraud cannot be avoided. An important issue is finding a middle-ground between reliable and exhaustive information regarding the operations of the aforementioned services and non-disclosure of facts which if disclosed could have a negative impact on the success of an investigation underway. One must remember that it is this information made available to the media, and thus to society, that influences how these services are seen in the eyes of the public.

The only efficient manner to make this type of information available is through the use of pro-active information policies in conjunction with cooperation with the given services. The press teams, in executing these types of policies, must know what they want to make available, how they want to make information available and when will be the best time to undertake the appropriate actions. The means of communicating with society must always be based on the context of the information being made available – it can be promotional information, cautionary information or preventative information.

One of the barriers involved in executing a pro-active policy regarding information is associated with the non-disclosure of professional or treasury information of a confidential nature, therefore potentially limiting the flow of information between the individual services and the media.

A certain danger is also associated with potential “rivalry” between organizations working together. Sometimes, these services compete against each other in creating information available to the media regarding their achievements in the battle against crime. The services that are first in making information available are looked upon as the only (or most effective) ones involved in discovering the given crime.

Another barrier in active communication with society may be the limited and uninteresting manner of making information available associated with activities being conducted.

Also of significant importance is that the services respond quickly and accordingly to information appearing in the media. A lack of reaction is badly seen by the public.

Due to the nature of the current situation in Poland arising from a growing crisis in public trust in the government, the media are oriented towards touching subjects of a negative nature, that are sensationalistic, thus putting press teams in a difficult situation.

Units involved in shaping information and communication with the media in all services are found responsible for financial irregularities.

**Police:** as part of its prevention and promotional activities, the police make available information regarding methods of preventing and combating crime plus information associated with new technical solutions and procurement of equipment. The police website is also a constant source of information regarding police activities. Various types of units are used by the police when handling media associated with a given event, e.g., mobile information points (representatives of the press office at the scene of the event give information directly to journalists on-site), crisis press services (experienced employees of the press relations department prepare press releases made available at the press centre) as well as the press centre (a centre in which police work achievements are presented).

**Border Guard:** fulfils its assignments regarding communications with the media through the Border Guard Head Office press centre as well as by means of the Border Guard regional offices’ spokesmen. In addition, the media have constant access to statistical data containing information related to the Border Guard activities.

Such information is made available in the form of informational materials, press conferences as well as answers to specific questions asked by media representatives. A constant form of communication is the Border Guard Head Office website in addition to press bulletins sent to local media by press secretaries. The Border Guard Service also initiates and organizes excursions with groups of Polish and foreign journalists in order for them to become acquainted with given areas of the border and how these are defended by such excursions generating positive press publications of a European and international reach.

**Customs Service:** cooperates with the media by placing information on its website regarding attempts at smuggling discovered by its officers, information on actions associated with fiscal crimes, fiscal misdemeanours as well as the scope of tax supervision. In addition, articles published in the "*Wiadomości Celne*" [*Customs News*] newspaper describe some of the most interesting smuggling attempts, customs and tax swindles discovered by customs officers. The Customs Service also makes available to the media information related to discovered attempts, penalties which smugglers face as well as information regarding trade of strategic commodities, e.g. weaponry. Additionally, the Customs Service conducts a number of precautionary activities such as organizing expositions, press conferences related to a specific subject as well as preparing leaflets on changes in tax and customs laws, among others.

The issues discussed previously clearly show the important role that communication between these services, the press and society plays. Undoubtedly, greater awareness among society as well as the knowledge that a penalty for a given crime cannot be avoided is partially the result of constant information regarding the success that organizations such as these achieve in their fight against crime. In order for communication with society to be successful, the individual services must always keep in mind the needs and reactions of society. If the media and these organizations lead pro-active policies regarding information, this will undeniably help in combating irregularities and fraud. Information made available to society by these organizations will increase society's awareness of how these organizations work towards securing public safety and combating criminals.

/The text was prepared in cooperation with The Public Communication Office of the Ministry of Finance, The Press Services of the Customs Service, The General Police Headquarters and The Border Guard General Headquarters /

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