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## **Operation "Rain in the desert": OLAF and Italian Guardia di Finanza uncover €9 million fraud against the financial interests of the EU**

**Joint investigative action by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the Italian Guardia di Finanza led to the discovery of a major fraud scheme which deprived the EU finances of over €9 million. An Italian company was found to have abused financing from the European Development Fund destined for development projects in Africa. Pending judicial proceedings, the Italian authorities have seized buildings belonging to the company under investigation, and have ordered the freezing of the company's assets and current accounts. This operation is the result of the good cooperation and operational synergies between OLAF and the Guardia di Finanza.**

The action of the Italian authorities was triggered by two OLAF investigations of 2010 and 2011. These investigations revealed that an Italian company based in Rome had fraudulently obtained EU funds destined for infrastructure development projects in Africa.

Among the many methods used, the company entered into fictitious partnerships in order to receive the EU funding. It abusively presented in its technical documentation the names of experts that were unaware of the projects or had not agreed to participate in them, and replaced suitable experts with less qualified persons once the EU funding had been granted. Such fraudulent methods allowed the company to win tenders and obtain EU funding to the detriment of other law-abiding competitors. In addition, the fraudulent behaviour harmed the EU financial interests by causing the bad implementation of several development projects, which will now require further investment for the repair of faulty infrastructure.

OLAF made financial recommendations to the relevant European Commission department. It advised the imposition of administrative financial penalties upon the company involved and the seeking of additional contractual damages. OLAF transmitted the results of its investigations to the competent Italian authorities for their information and potential follow-up.

The Italian Guardia di Finanza proceeded with follow-up investigations which unveiled an extensive fraud pattern spanning contracts covering several African countries. Pursuant to these investigations, the Judge for Preliminary Investigations of Rome ordered the seizure of buildings belonging to the company under investigation, as well as the freezing of assets and current accounts. Judicial proceedings are currently on-going in Italy.

**Background:**

For further details please contact the Press Office of the Guardia di Finanza:  
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**OLAF**

The mission of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) is threefold: it protects the financial interests of the European Union by investigating fraud, corruption and any other illegal activities; it detects and investigates serious matters relating to the discharge of professional duties by members and staff of the EU institutions and bodies that could result in disciplinary or criminal proceedings; and it supports the EU institutions, in particular the European Commission, in the development and implementation of anti-fraud legislation and policies.

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