

19th OAFCN Meeting - Brussels, 6 May 2011

Opening Session

1. Welcome by OLAF Director General, Mr. Giovanni Kessler (GK)

GK welcomed the participants. He underlined that, in light of the current economic crisis and of the Commission-wide budgetary cuts, OLAF mission to fight fraud and protect the EU's financial interests is more important than ever. With its many communication experts and anti-fraud services, the OLAF Anti-Fraud Communicators' Network can be used to extend the rule of law and to raise anti-fraud awareness with the general public. However, he warned that anti-fraud communication is sometimes very difficult and he stressed the importance of defining and coordinating a joint communication strategy. He added that, although one added value of the OAFCN is networking, within the current economic context, networking cannot be enough to justify three events per year; therefore the number of annual meetings needs to be reduced to two. Moreover, refinements to OAFCN activities are needed in order to identify communication activities with a greater impact on public opinion: the OAFCN needs to re-focus its communication activities in order to produce more concrete and tangible results.

Pavel Bořkovec (PB) thanked Mr Kessler for attending the meeting and welcomed Elisabeth Kotthaus (EK) from the Cabinet and David Boubilil (DB), Semeta's Spokesman. He then gave the floor to EK for a short address.

EK briefly described the European Commission's main initiatives in the pipeline to prevent fraud and corruption:

- the reform of OLAF: on 17 March 2011 the Commission adopted the amended proposal for the reform of OLAF. The anti-fraud working group within the Council is already working on it and the reform could be adopted by the end of the year.
- Communication on a renewed multi-annual Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy: the Commission is currently preparing this communication whose main objective is to provide a framework for better and a more coherent protection of EU financial interests.
- Communication on the protection of the financial interests of the EU by criminal law and by administrative investigations. This political communication, which complements the anti-fraud strategy, will be developed by Commissioner Semeta and VP Reding.
- Action Plan to fight against smuggling of cigarettes and alcohol along the EU Eastern Border

Finally, Commissioner Malmström intends to produce an "anti-corruption package", together with the Anti-Fraud Strategy, which should contain a Communication on a comprehensive EU policy against corruption along with three other documents.

PB thanked EK and welcomed TAXUD colleagues, Jean-François Belaud and Jasmine Puoti, representing the EU Communication Network for Taxation and Customs (ECNtc). He also introduced a new OAFCN member, Ms. Alexandra Sárközi, spokesperson of the National Tax and Customs Administration (HU). He finally thanked Mrs Niki Hadjiyianni (NH) from the Department of Customs & Excise (CY) for attending her last OAFCN meeting before retiring as from 1st September. PB recalled that NH was not only a great advocator of the OAFCN, but it was also her service who co-hosted the 8th OAFCN seminar in Nicosia in 2008, which was a great success.

2. *Approval of the Minutes of the 18th OAFCN Meeting, The Hague, 9-10 December 2009.*
The minutes of the previous meeting were approved without any comments or questions.

3. *Purpose and programme of the day*

PB reminded of the background for this meeting and the origins of the reflection on the future of the OAFCN, which started during the 18th OAFCN meeting (The Hague, 9-10 December 2010 in cooperation with Europol and Eurojust) with the creation of a task force, composed of 16 OAFCN volunteers¹. PB explained that the so called "OAFCN reflection group" had already met twice (Brussels, 31 January and 28 March 2011) and that as a result an "OAFCN vision paper" had been drafted. This document outlines not only the legal basis of the creation of the OAFCN, but also its mission, internal organisation and activities, as well as some key proposals for more effective cooperation in the future. He explained that the purpose of the day was mainly to define together some common projects, both reasonable and feasible, to be implemented by the Network in the near future. He then introduced Matthieu Kleinschmager (MK), EC internal facilitator, who would help during the day with this common reflection.

MK explained that he had been contacted by OLAF to facilitate the two meetings of the reflection group with a collaborative approach. He then described the programme of the day, which would start with a first session, in the morning, focused on the reflection on the future of the OAFCN and on a common discussion on the basis of the OAFCN vision paper drafted by the reflection group, followed by a second session, in the afternoon, focused on moving OAFCN activities forward and engaging the OAFCN on the most effective communication actions.

4. *Adoption of the Agenda*

The agenda was adopted with no changes.

Reflection on the future of the OAFCN: discussion on the basis of the OAFCN vision paper drafted by the Reflection group

After a short general discussion where all OAFCN members were invited to reflect on their own motivation and engagement within the Network, MK gave the floor to some volunteers from the OAFCN reflection group to present the OAFCN vision paper. David Jones (Serious Fraud Office, UK) and Sabina Langus-Boc (Customs, SI) introduced the OAFCN mission, Dorota Kwiecińska (Ministry of Finance, PL) presented the OAFCN internal organisation and Lorenzo Pisoni (Agenzia delle Dogane, IT) the OAFCN activities.

PB briefly introduced the proposal of appointing an OAFCN Advisory Board, composed of 5 OAFCN volunteers, who would assist the OLAF Spokesperson in stirring the activities of the Network. The Advisory Board should be elected at an OAFCN regular meeting and its mandate should be one year.

PB gave the floor to Gian Luca Berruti (GLB – Guardia di Finanza, IT) who presented the "*media awareness campaign for 2012*", a project which could be carried out jointly by OLAF and some 6/7 OAFCN volunteers (one step per participant). Each step should concern a joint

¹ Johan De Volder, Wolfgang Schmitz, Lorenzo Pisoni, Carlo Felice Corsetti, Paolo Rebecchi, David Jones, Paul Mathews, Sophie Hoquerelle, Jiri Bartak, Miroslav Bednar, Reneta Nikolova, Dorota Kwiecinska, Sabina Langus Boc, Anette Malmberg, Gerald Hesztera, Joannes Thuy (see 18th OAFCN meeting minutes for further details).

operation between OLAF and the national authority of the project partner; he then presented, as a pilot action, joint media activities regarding an operation carried out jointly by OLAF and the Guardia di Finanza in April 2011.

PB briefly explained the *European Institutions' Open Day 2011* with the involvement of some OAFCN representatives on the OLAF stand. The stand would comprise 3 main parts: OLAF's cooperation with its national partners from customs, who would give an overview of their services' activities, notably in the field of counterfeit products; OLAF fight against euro counterfeiting; and an investigative quiz.

OAFCN members were then divided into working groups to collect ideas and feedback on the basis of these presentations, and the morning session ended with voting on actions to be undertaken with the greatest potential impact. In response to the question "*How will we as a Network make the biggest difference now & in the future?*", the results were the following:

- Yearly plan with objectives: 22 votes
- Improved website: 22 votes (DJ)
- EU anti-fraud day: 19 votes (M. Aasmae)
- Newsletter: 14 votes (N Dusseldorf)
- Subgroups on specific issues: 13 votes
- Joint communication campaigns: 12 votes (GLB)
- Meeting with journalists in Member States: 9 votes (LP)
- Operational input: 6 votes
- Central authority in OAFCN to disseminate information on cases: 5 votes
- Common knowledge of national procedures: 4 votes
- Joint press releases: 1 vote

Moving OAFCN activities forward

The following OAFCN members volunteered to create working groups on the more realistic actions to be implemented within the following year which would possibly have the biggest impact: David Jones (Better website); Mailin Aasmae (EU anti-fraud day), Nico Dusseldorf (Newsletter); Gian Luca Berruti (Joint communication campaigns); Lorenzo Pisoni (Meeting with journalists in Member States). The volunteers were then invited to share the results of their working groups, and OAFCN members were invited to commit themselves by signing up to any of these OAFCN activities. PB asked the project leaders to send a short report of their working group as soon as possible by e-mail (project reports in Annex I).

14. Any other business

- *Organisation of the 11th OAFCN Training Seminar*

PB confirmed the final date and location of the 11th OAFCN Training Seminar (Berlin, 30/11 - 2/12/2011) and thanked the Zollkriminalamt and its OAFCN representative, Wolfgang Schmitz (WS), for co-hosting the event. He then gave the floor to WS who explained that the Berlin event would combine both the regular meeting - half a day on Wednesday – and the training seminar. He proposed to extend the audience to a more political level, inviting Heads of Government and their Spokespersons, which would give the Network the possibility to present its ideas on a political level.

- *Advisory Board: vote and election*

PB recalled the discussion held in the morning about the Advisory Board and he called for five candidates. He added that the first task for them would certainly be to help OLAF organise the Training Seminar in Berlin, notably by discussing the theme and agenda. The following members volunteered: David Jones, Gian Luca Berruti, Joannes Thuy, Nico Dusseldorf, Lorenzo Pisoni, as well as Wolfgang Schmitz representing the co-host organisation.

PB thanked the newly-elected Advisory Board members, Matthieu Kleinschmager for his help, and all the participants, and he invited them to meet back for the OAFCN dinner in Charlemagne at 19.30, with the presence of OLAF's Director General.

End of Meeting

Project Report: Anti-Fraud Day

OAFCN members: Mailin Aasmäe, Jiri Bartak, Alfred Mallia, Mario Debono, Michael Cassar, Dorota Kwiecinska, Ruslan Golubov, Ruta Andriuskaite, Magdalena Fendrychova, Tatiana Prievalska, Christian Fuhrnstal, Dora Tari-Benits, Alexandra Sarkozy,

Why? To raise awareness. Fraud affects us all, because we are all taxpayers.

When? On the birthday of OLAF, 28th April.

Where? Celebrated in all Member States.

How?

- Create a central team, who will draw up a framework meaning, of which all countries will use the same structure and components.
- Organise a press conference, use interesting statistics, examples to make it interesting.
- Attract a wide audience. We do not specialise so we focus on all kinds of fraud prevention.
- Hand out PR materials: posters, videos, organise an exhibition.
- A part of the day should be an OLAF presentation, preferably from an OLAF representative.
- Arrange an informal seminar for journalists.
- *Feedback: should focus every year on a specific subject in order to attract a more direct audience.*

Who will cover the cost?

The OAFCN; member states themselves; with funding from the Hercule programme.

Project Report : OAFCN Newsletter

OAFCN members: Nico Dusseldorf (LU), Niki Hadjiyanni, Eleni Constantinou and Matheos Siamptanis (CY), Joannes Thuy (Eurojust), Tatiana Prievalska (SK), Pavel Borkovec (OLAF).

First we discussed the content of a possible newsletter and we noticed the following elements:

- Operations realized could be described
- Organizational developments
- Examples of campaigns
- Legislative changes
- Family news – departure of members, arrival of new members
- Court decisions on important international cases
- Joint customs operations

The next discussion focused on frequency and we agreed that it would be reasonable to publish it initially twice a year, perhaps a few weeks before our Spring meetings and the second edition in the autumn. It should also be a short 2-page newsletter from containing short articles on the above-mentioned themes.

Initially, the newsletter should be addressed to OAFCN members and not to the press, but all members are free to publish contents in the local press.

The newsletter could also contain photos or video links.

It will only be written in English as translation in other languages will be too expensive.

A discussion with the other groups revealed that the idea was appreciated by all participants, with the following comments:

- It's better than a webpage
- Not only distributed electronically but also a printed version
- Good coordination is necessary and deadlines for articles should be fixed
- It should be distributed to a larger public
- Two times a year does not seem to be enough
- The newsletter should be published also on the Extranet and Circa, so that we can collect all editions for the future.

Eleni Constantinou, Matheos Siamptanis, Tatiana Prievalska, Joannes Thuy and Nico Dusseldorf are interested to coordinate the first edition together with OLAF.

Project Report: Briefing for journalists

OAFCN Members: Lorenzo Pisoni, Violetta Bottazzo, Irena Kure, Mauro Valeri, Leen de Zutter.

What is most important is to organize a European mailing list with the addresses of the main European newspapers and TV. This mailing list must be compiled from the national mailing lists of the 27 Member States. All these mailing lists are to be produced at national level. Every Press Office should contact newspapers and TV channels and ask for expert journalists on fraud. Press officers should speak with these journalists and ask them for their consent to have their details, including e-mail address, on the mailing list. Having received their consent, it is possible to create a national mailing list of expert journalists on fraud. All these 27 mailing lists become part of a European mailing list divided per country. These contacts are provided to OLAF by OAFCN representatives in the Member States. This mailing list can be used at 3 levels:

1. national level: for news of national importance (for example OLAF information about an Italian manager importing products from outside the European Union);
2. multinational level: for news regarding two or more Member States (OLAF information about a manager operating in many Member States);
3. European level: for joint operations regarding OLAF investigations in coordination with Member State authorities.

The next step is to write press releases for each of these 3 levels and 1) to publish them on OLAF's website and 2) send them to the mass media. Press releases should be related to investigations, for example confiscations regarding fraud affecting the financial interests of the European Union. At the end of every press release it could be useful to provide the contact details of an expert, for journalists who would like to receive further information.

For breaking news regarding investigations of great national, multi-state, European interest (for example joint operations), it could be useful to organize press conferences. In this case press releases should be published on OLAF's website after the conferences. At the press conferences, we should encourage all journalists to write and broadcast as much as possible about the results of the investigations and to give us feedback.

Breakfast press conferences could be useful for daily afternoon newspapers.

At press conferences we can provide documentation with useful information about OLAF.

Press conferences at national level would be held in the Member State concerned. Press conferences at multi-state level would be held in the member state where the fact that emerged is particularly relevant. Press conferences at European level would be held at OLAF's offices in Brussels.

Press conferences should not last more than 1 hour: 15 mins to give journalists all the details about the news + 15 mins to answer all questions + 15 mins for individual interviews + 15 mins to ask journalists for feedback on the news.

It could be useful to organize coffee seminars for journalists with the theme "Putting theory into practice", to let them know latest relevant news of the activities of OLAF at national and European level in Brussels. As all journalists are looking for news, if they are informed about OLAF's activities, they can more easily write interesting news. **To start cooperation with all 27 Member States we have to establish an exchange: more visibility of Member States' activities related to fraud on OLAF's website and vice versa.**

Project Report: OLAF's website

The sub-group that discussed the topic of the OLAF website comprised:

- **David Jones**, Serious Fraud Office, UK
- Kaia-Liisa Kallas, Customs Board, Estonia
- Miroslav Bednar, Prosecutors Office, Czech Republic
- Stanislav Durina, Customs Criminal Office, Slovakia
- Wolfgang Schmitz, Customs Criminal Office, Germany

The discussion revolved around a suggestion that OLAF raise its visibility by revamping its website. Rather than being based on an empirical analysis or survey, this opinion is more one of perception. The discussion revealed that OLAF is itself already giving this some consideration. OLAF acknowledges that the present website is outdated; it is, after all, over ten years old.

However the essence of the discussion was to explore the feasibility of the OAFCN contributing to or participating in any overhaul of the OLAF website. Key points raised were that the current website:

- Uses formal language
- isn't attractive or enticing to the general public
- isn't user-friendly
- structure/style is confusing

Suggestions include:

Having distinct parts, described as "shelves"; one designed and written for a professional/technical audience, another for the general public, possibly to include computer games. Educational for a younger audience. And a "press shelf".

Is it practical for the OAFCN to be involved?

It was agreed that OAFCN members couldn't run the renewal project. This would not be acceptable to OLAF. There are issues of accountability, availability and of responsibility with the EC structure. Nevertheless an idea that emerged is that the OAFCN could be involved in the project to some degree by contributing ideas, participating in any "brainstorming" or evaluating proposals. The number of OAFCN members to be involved would depend on practicalities and any cost implications for OLAF. They would however need to demonstrate sound website project experience or skills.

OAFCN members who have expressed a willingness to be involved are:

- Kaia-Liisa Kallas, Customs Board, Estonia
- Miroslav Bednar, Prosecutors Office, Czech Republic
- Stanislav Durina, Customs Criminal Office, Slovakia
- Wolfgang Schmitz, Customs Criminal Office, Germany
- Tatiana Prievalska, OLAF Central Contact Point, Slovakia

Project Report: Media awareness campaign on the EU fight against fraud for 2012

O AFCN Members participating: Gian Luca Berruti, Stefanija Lukic Zlobec, Drago Menegalija, Ioannis Rountos, Johan De Volder, Sabina Langus Boc, Carmen Rascanu, Patrice Bertrand.

1. The “media awareness” campaign consists, in general, in the development of an annual concrete media initiative between the various O AFCN partners willing to participate in the project on a voluntary basis.

2. The aim of the campaign is to plan, structure, organize and arrange several media initiatives (e.g. interviews with persons responsible for police or customs authorities, support for the production of films about operations against EU fraud, organization of press conferences in the field of anti-fraud) in order to allow OLAF’s message (namely the fight against fraud) to reach as many European citizens as possible.

3. These media initiatives should be carried out in 6/7 steps, (one step per country/participant);

4. Each step should concern a joint operation between OLAF and the customs or police authorities of the project partner countries;

5. Each step should be accompanied by:

- a. photographs or audiovisual material (concerning the operation or footage);
- b. a press release concerning the operation;
- c. interviews with the persons responsible for the operation and other in-depth journalistic coverage;
- d. a targeted press review;

6. Each step should be characterized by:

- a. a common message, i.e. a slogan aimed at making the public aware, simply and directly, of the aim of the anti-fraud activities carried out in the various partner countries;
- b. the constant display, in all the above media activities, of the logos of both authors of the step (OLAF and police or customs authority of the partner country)