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Editorial

EDITORIAL

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Dear Readers of this jubilee issue on OLAF,

In 2024, the European Anti-Fraud Office – OLAF – was celebrating its 25th anniversary. This occasion fills me with joy, pride, and gratitude, as the Office has proven to be a great success in the fight against fraud affecting the financial interests of the EU over the last quarter of the century.

OLAF took over operations from the first European anti-fraud entity – UCLAF – in 1999 (UCLAF had been created in 1987 as part of the Secretariat-General of the European Commission). Since then, we have come a long way. While still part of the European Commission, OLAF is fully independent in the conduct of its investigative mandate.

OLAF investigators have uncovered around €16 billion that would otherwise have been lost to irregularities or fraud: for every euro that OLAF's operations cost, we tracked down at least €10 to be recovered to the EU's budget. In total, OLAF has closed over 6000 investigations with recommendations for further action that range from recovering money or improving administrative checks to launching criminal proceedings or initiating disciplinary procedures.

Over the years, OLAF has undergone organisational changes to adapt to new challenges and become more efficient in the fight against fraud. In 2021, the revision of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 883/2013, the centrepiece of OLAF's legal framework, brought important improvements, e.g., the possibility for OLAF to access bank account information. Close cooperation with the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), which took up its operations in 2021, was also established. Since then, the EPPO and OLAF work hand in hand to protect EU taxpayer's money. Both bodies ensure that we use all available means, administrative and prosecutorial, to protect the EU budget from fraud.

Regulation 883/2013 is currently being evaluated with a particular focus on OLAF-EPPO cooperation. The results of this evaluation will help OLAF become even more efficient in the future.

By adapting to the changing context in which the Office operates in today's complex, digitalised, and globalised world, we are going to build, not rest, on our work in the last 25 years. Enhanced investigations through data analysis and artificial intelligence will play a key role in addressing this new context, e.g., new digital tools are being deployed in our Anti-Fraud Knowledge Centre. OLAF has also established a large network of international partners and become an important actor in the fight against cross-border fraud. 25 years ago, fraudsters did not have to worry too much about cross-border investigations. This has changed considerably.

Environmental crime has also become increasingly relevant across the EU, as fraudsters run relatively low risks for high profits. To counter this growing concern, OLAF participates in coordination cases with the Member States and other key partners such as Interpol, Europol, and Eurojust. So far, OLAF has participated in numerous actions, e.g., against illegal wildlife trade, illegal trade of refrigerant gases, food fraud, and illegal waste shipments. The new Waste Shipment Regulation will reinforce OLAF's mandate in this area.

OLAF's success story over the past 25 years would not have been possible without our partners in the EU institutions and bodies, Member States, international organisations, candidate countries, non-EU countries, financial institutions, and other stakeholders, including the Office's highly committed staff. I would also like to thank all actors in civil society and academia who have taken a keen interest in OLAF, in the EPPO, and in developing the European dimension of criminal law and law enforcement, enriching our work with their insights.

With the valuable support and engagement of all stakeholders, we will relentlessly continue to tackle new challenges and optimise our operations for the benefit of European citizens and enterprises. OLAF's success story is sure to continue.

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Editorially reviewed articles published in English, French, or German, are complemented by timely news and analysis of legal and policy developments across Europe.

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