

Building stronger defences against fraud: OLAF hosts 2025 AFCOS seminar with candidate countries

Strengthening anti-fraud cooperation with EU enlargement countries was at the centre of the 2025 AFCOS Seminar, organised by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and held in Tirana (Albania) on 8–9 October. Participants representing the 10 candidate countries and potential candidates discussed challenges and practical ways to strengthen transparency. Protecting the European Union’s financial interests is an integral part of the EU enlargement process.

The two-day event gathered around 80 representatives of Anti-Fraud Coordination Services (AFCOS) as well as investigative and management authorities from candidate countries and potential candidates, along with experts from OLAF, the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood (DG ENEST) and the EU Delegations. The event served to strengthen cooperation between national authorities and OLAF and provided a forum to exchange best practices and guidance on implementing EU accession requirements. It also helped candidate countries build the capacity to protect the European Union’s financial interests.

Opening speeches were delivered by OLAF’s acting Director-General, Salla Saastamoinen, Petrit Malaj, Minister of Finance of the Republic of Albania, and Silvio Gonzato, EU Ambassador to Albania.

"This seminar goes beyond sharing expertise; together we build trust and create practical channels of cooperation," said Salla Saastamoinen. *"By working closely with AFCOS offices and other national authorities, we ensure that EU funds are spent as intended and that any wrongdoings against EU funds are effectively prevented and investigated. Demonstrating their capacity to handle EU funds is a key part of advancing towards Union membership."*

Participants shared insights, compared experiences and addressed the main challenges they face in protecting EU funds against wrongdoings. Sessions covered case studies and good practice examples in OLAF-AFCOS cooperation and examined the latest trends in EU performance-based funding and their impact on anti-fraud measures. The changing role of AFCOS, particularly under the new EU funding facilities like those for the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova, was also discussed. Exchanges were interactive and practical, allowing participants to raise questions and share solutions to concrete anti-fraud challenges.

Background

Anti-Fraud Coordination Services (AFCOS) are national contact points that link OLAF with domestic investigative and management bodies. Their work is essential to protecting EU funds from fraud and irregularities and is a key part of the accession process, ensuring candidate countries meet EU anti-fraud standards before joining the Union. By hosting this year's seminar in Tirana, OLAF and Albania reaffirmed their commitment to working together to safeguard EU resources and strengthen the integrity of EU funding.

OLAF mission, mandate and competences:

OLAF's mission is to detect, investigate and stop wrongdoings related to EU funds.

OLAF fulfils its mission by:

- carrying out independent investigations into fraud, corruption and irregularities 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 irregularities 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.

Once OLAF has completed its investigation, it is for the competent EU and national authorities to examine and decide on the follow-up of OLAF's recommendations. All persons concerned are presumed to be innocent until proven guilty in a competent national or EU court of law.

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