

New system to report corruption and fraud anonymously

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Corruption and fraud can now be reported via the Internet, even anonymously: A new electronic system - "Fraud Notification System" (FNS) - will make it easier and more secure for vigilant citizens and EU civil servants to report suspicious cases to the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). The new portal (FNS) goes online today.

'Citizens and business people frequently ask us how they should go about reporting suspected fraud involving EU funds to us,' said acting OLAF Director-General, Nicholas Ilett. 'From time to time we also hear from EU civil servants who, despite all the legal guarantees, are cautious about approaching us directly about cases where they suspect corruption is going on,' he adds. 'Our new Fraud Notification System should help everybody. First it offers informants a simple user-friendly interface. Second it gives people the opportunity to submit information to OLAF anonymously but nevertheless to enter into a dialogue with our investigators', explained Mr Ilett.

OLAF has always relied in part on the support of citizens, businesses and EU employees in fulfilling its task of protecting the financial interests of the European Union and combating fraud, corruption and other irregularities, including official misconduct, within the EU institutions. The Office has been receiving tip-offs from across Europe via freephone numbers and e-mail for several years.

OLAF is now extending this service to include a new Internet-based fraud reporting system, developed with OLAF's specific role in mind. It provides informants with a structured format to help and guide them through the process of reporting offences.

In line with the applicable legislation, OLAF has always investigated anonymous reports, but until now had to subject them to stricter preliminary scrutiny in order to prevent abuse. In the process, OLAF investigators regularly face the practical problem of being unable – inevitable with anonymous informants - to ask questions in order to obtain clarification.

This problem is solved by the Fraud Notification System, since the latest technical safeguards both guarantee informants absolute anonymity and at the same time enable them, if they so wish, to enter into dialogue with OLAF investigators. No one, either inside or outside OLAF, can discover the identity of anyone who has opted to remain anonymous. The system operates like a 'blind' letterbox where both parties can drop off messages.

For OLAF investigators, this has the advantage of helping them better to assess the credibility of anonymous reports of corruption and fraud and also makes abuse of the system much more difficult.

At the same time, the system enables potential informants who have so far not dared to contact OLAF to enter into a genuine dialogue with experienced investigators. Although EU staff who report suspicious circumstances and provide evidence are protected against reprisals of any kind, under the current rules of service individual colleagues who are unsure

about how allegations of corruption or fraud are assessed might hesitate to contact OLAF. The new system makes it easier for such colleagues them to make contact.

During a pilot phase the Fraud Notification System will be available in English, French, German and Dutch. However, reports can already be entered on the online form in any EU language. All the information received by OLAF is carefully examined and professionally scrutinised before it is decided whether or not to initiate an investigation.

Even during a test phase, several tip-offs were communicated via the new system and some of them led to further investigation.

The Fraud Notification System is accessible as of today via OLAF's website:

http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud/index_en.html