

PRESS RELEASE

On 21 July 2009 in the international press-club of the Bulgarian News Agency (BTA) was held the closing press conference on the partnership project of the Club Journalists Against Corruption (JAC Club) and the Bulgarian Public Prosecutor's Office, titled „**Mastering the experience of OLAF's Communicators Network OAFCN and the new European models for partnership with the judiciary**”.

Main target of the project which was started in September 2008 was to enhance the capacity of the JAC Club with a focus on its collaboration with the Prosecutor's Office. A lodestar of the project was adoption of the communication experience of the European Anti Fraud Office (OLAF) with a particular stress on audio-visual communication. The project was implemented within the frame of Operative Programme Administrative Capacity (OPAC).

Reneta Nikolova, president of the Club JAC and project manager, opened the press conference and expressed gratitude for the beneficial cooperation to the Director General of OLAF, Franz Hermann Bruner, to the spokesman of OLAF, Alessandro Buttice, to the Prosecutor General of Bulgaria, Boris Velchev, and to the representatives of the Spanish foundation FIIAPP.

Nikolova presented concrete outputs of the project:

Two study visits were carried out and 16 participants from institutions and media were trained in good practices. Two documentaries were shot and shown on the central Bulgarian television *BNT1*, on the satellite channel *TV Bulgaria*, the channels *BBT*, *BTB* and others. Three training seminars were carried out with over 150 participants and more than 40 international and Bulgarian experts.

10 regional clubs were visited and presented the project activities. Over 300 times information on the project was sent to international, national and regional media.

Debate on expert level and information campaign on the necessity of legislative amendments adoption was initiated, aimed at making possible for the of OLAF's investigation results to be used as evidence before the court.

Based on the experience and the good practices of Spain which have been studied during the project implementation, it was proposed to initiate a debate on expert level on the need of establishment of specialized courts and prosecutor's offices.

Following members of OAFCN were guests to the press conference: Wolfgang Schmietz – spokesman of ZollKriminalamt, Dagmar Papkunova – General Prosecutor's Office of Slovakia, Miroslava Skobikova – Customs Directorate, Slovakia, Jiri Bartak – spokesman of General Customs Directorate of the Czech Republic, Gennaro Vecchione – Head of the Italian Unit for Combating Fraud with Eurofunds responsible to the Prime Minister, and Gian Luca Berruti from the Italian Guardia di Finanza.

The Bulgarian party was presented by Hristo Manchev, Head of International Programmes Department of the Supreme Prosecutor's Office of Cassation, Nikolay Markov, Head of the press office of the Prosecutor's Office, Smilena Kostova, representative of the Spanish foundation FIIAPP for Bulgaria.

Hristo Manchev underlined that one of the most important tasks in the activities under the partnership project was to provoke public intolerance to corruption, fraud and misuse with Eurofunds.

Gennaro Vecchione pointed out that Italy pays special attention to enhancement of the collaboration with OAFCN.

International cooperation is extremely important in the fight against fraud, said Gian Luca Berruti and underlined the successful work in this direction of the JAC Club.

Wolfgang Schmietz expressed greetings on occasion of the successful project on behalf of Alessandro Buttice, OLAF's spokesman, and accentuated the role of media in informing the society on the work dedicated to fighting corruption, fraud and misappropriation of European funds.

Dagmar Papkunova expressed the hope that for Bulgaria useful would be also the experience of Slovakia where were established a Special Court and a Special Prosecutor's office which have been trying for four years now the most serious cases of corruption and fraud in the country.

At the end of the press conference which was attended with great interest Reneta Nikolova announced that on the base of the experience achieved, in the coming autumn a new project will be started on the role and importance of the international cooperation for countering fraud and misappropriation of Eurofunds, titled „OLAF Facing the Citizens of Europe”, financed under the Hercules II Programme.

Following the press conference a seminar took place with the theme „The Project *Mastering the experience of OAFCN and the new European models for collaboration with the judiciary – outputs, conclusions, effect of diffusion*”. The guests from Italy, Germany, Slovakia and the Czech Republic were lecturers on the seminar.

Special guests to the seminar were the ambassadors to Bulgaria - H.E. Carol Mistrik of Slovakia and H.E. Martin Klepetko of the Czech Republic.

Ambassador Mistrik greeted the attendees and participants and expressed the opinion that transparency is “enemy number one” to corruption, and the work of organizations of the kind like JAC Club in this regard is of high public importance.

The seminar was attended by prosecutors and journalists from Sofia and the country.