# Commission's progress report on the European Anti-Fraud Office OLAF activities

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Herbert BÖSCH (PES, A) in response to the Commission's progress report on the activities of the EU anti-fraud office OLAF. The committee was sharply critical of OLAF and called for strong leadership, clear priorities and a clear investigation policy at the anti-fraud office as well as a greater role for OLAF's Supervisory Committee. MEPs criticised the inefficiency of OLAF's investigations, the inadequate protection of the rights of people affected by its enquiries and inconsistencies in OLAF's communication policy: it demands silence from the institutions being investigated but itself divulges information to the media. The committee also criticised the Commission for presenting its report on OLAF's activities more than a year late and for not addressing the serious problems identified. The committee demanded that an audit be carried out at OLAF as of January 2004 to assess the effectiveness of its investigations. The audit should come under the responsibility of the Supervisory Committee, which consists of five independent outside individuals appointed by common accord of the Parliament, Council and Commission. The Supervisory Committee should ensure in future that the rights of people affected by OLAF investigations are respected and should approve new rules, to be drafted by the director of OLAF, governing its investigative activities and the information it provides on these activities. The Supervisory Committee secretariat should be moved from OLAF itself to the European Parliament. OLAF's budget should have a separate heading, in the same way as the Ombudsman's. MEPs said that, in establishing its working programme for 2004, OLAF should give priority to investigations where national authorities have no particular interests or powers, such as investigations within the EU institutions and agencies. At least 140 posts should be made available for internal investigations. MEPs also criticised the fact that the post of coordinator of anti-fraud activities in the accession countries had not yet been filled. Other recommendations made by the committee were for more effective controls of directors-general in order to avoid misuse of power, for example by having the DGs' internal auditors answer to the central internal auditor rather than to their director-general; and ensuring better protection of whistle-blowers and the possibility for EU civil servants to address OLAF directly, without informing their own superiors. In its final reports OLAF should include a recommendation for a thorough investigation of any inadequate administrative structures. The anti-fraud office should also carry out a detailed analysis of those sectors in which most investigations have been launched, namely the structural funds, trade, customs, aid, agriculture and direct expenditure. Member States should identify which national authorities should assist OLAF with on-site checks. Finally, MEPs called on the Commission to advertise the post of Director of OLAF in spring 2004, as the present Director's appointment was due to end in March 2005 and the procedures for this appointment take a long time.