



1st July 2024

Press Release of the Bridge Forum Dialogue conference "The EPPO: a new EU judicial institution?"

The Bridge Forum Dialogue organised on Thursday 27 June 2024 a conference under the title: **"The EPPO: a new EU judicial institution?"**.

A very large and distinguished audience gathered for this event, either personally or virtually.

It included representatives from the European institutions and bodies, public authorities and actors of the academic, economic and social sphere.

Mr M.N. Outzen, on behalf of the European Parliament, welcomed the participants. This conference is the first to be held in the new "Europa Experience" visitors centre in Luxembourg.

Mr Jan GREGOR, Member of the European Court of Auditors, introduced and chaired the conference on behalf of the Bridge Forum Dialogue. He explained that the keynote speaker, Ms Laura Kövesi, former Chief of Romania's Anticorruption Office, was confirmed in October 2019, by the European Parliament and the Council, as the first European Chief Prosecutor, to head the recently created European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO).

Then, Ms Laura Codruța KÖVESI took the floor.

She explained how EPPO has become the youngest of European Institutions.

EPPO investigates, prosecutes and brings to judgment, the perpetrators of criminal offences affecting the financial interests of the Union.

It can use all the investigation measures that are available to national prosecutors.

EPPO is a "body of the Union" and not a mere decentralised agency of an EU institution.

It is an independent institution, not under the control of any other. It is not the result of a delegation of powers by the Union's Executive but an independent judicial authority. This independence lies in the constitutional principle of the separation of powers.



Together with the European Court of Justice, it represents the judicial pillar of the EU.

Democracy can exist only where no one is above the law.

EPPO is here to prove that the law is equal for everyone.

EPPO is an European institution but is embedded in the national justice systems of the participating Member States. Currently 23 EU Member States participate in the EPPO, shortly even more.

The EPPO counts 151 European delegated Prosecutors located in 42 offices.

The European Delegated Prosecutors investigate and prosecute according to national criminal laws and national procedural criminal laws. They bring their cases to judgement before national courts.

Compared to traditional cross-border coordination methods, we are much faster.

This unique combination of decentralised and central capacities, and synergies created between the national law enforcement authorities, allows EPPO to investigate all the ramifications of a cross -border case. EPPO is the first transnational Prosecution office.

As you can read in EPPO's latest Annual Report, at the end of 2023, EPPO had more than 1.900 active investigations, with an overall estimated damage of more than 19 billion €.

Over 200 of these investigations relate to the first projects funded under NextGenerationEU.

Almost 60 % of the estimated damage under EPPO's investigations was linked to VAT fraud.

EPPO's main finding from last year is that such a large scale of fraud, especially on the revenue side of the EU budget, can only be explained by the heavy involvement of organised crime.

The investigations reveal that complex VAT fraud operations are often financed with money from other criminal activities or involve the same operators laundering money.

VAT fraud is no longer a "niche" criminal authority. It has become one of the most attractive criminal enterprises within the EU. There are not two separate criminal worlds.

The world of the really bad and dangerous criminal smuggling drugs, trafficking people on the one side; and the world of white collar criminals, merely corrupting and laundering money, on the other side. Serious organised crime cannot exist without financial crime.

This is a reason EPPO cannot treat financial fraud as a minor offence. It is not the only reason. Recent tragedies prove that fraud and corruption eventually kill.

When we open a case ex officio, the key question, the only question, is if the citizens trust in our activity

Ms Kövesi shared three ideas on how to achieve more.

Firstly, EPPO's strategy should be to cripple the financial capacity of the organised crime groups.

In order to do that, EPPO needs dedicated and specialised investigators in support of their work and, as the first international Prosecution Office, corresponding analytical capacities.

Secondly, the EPPO is the most efficient tool currently available for the fight against transnational criminal organisations.

If this is valid for VAT and customs fraud, it also applies to the circumvention of EU restrictive measures. EPPO could already get involved in certain investigations involving the circumvention of EU sanctions.

Thirdly, the EPPO Regulation must be revised in light of the experience in the first three years of operations. The most pressing issues are well known. EPPO needs to clarify and to simplify provisions of on the exercise of EPPO's competence, and prevent any attempts to undermine EPPO' jurisdiction in sensitive cases. It is now merely a question of political will.

The revision of the Regulation will also be an opportunity to state the true institutional nature of EPPO, as explained hereabove.

The presentation was followed by a stimulating **questions and answers session**, under the chairmanship of Mr Jan Gregor.

Detailed information on this Conference is available on the website of the Bridge Forum Dialogue a.s.b.l.: www.forum-dialogue.lu .

Photo from left to right:

Ms Viviane REDING, Former Vice-President of the European Commission, President of the « Fondation du Mérite Européen » (FME)

Ms Laura Codruța KÖVESI, European Chief Prosecutor of the European Public Prosecutor Office (EPPO)

Mr Jan GREGOR, Member of the European Court of Auditors

