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Inge Gräßle (EPP/CDU):

Commission puts OLAF independence in danger

The new proposal by the European Commission for a regulation amending the current regulation on OLAF, the EU's body for fighting fraud, is ill-devised, says the EPP Group spokesperson in the European Parliament's Budgetary Control Committee, Inge Gräßle MEP. "A large part of the Commission's analysis is to the point, but the conclusions are wrong and contradictory," she said.

"It seems that the Commission has finally realised that the protection of basic rights of persons subject to OLAF investigations is insufficient. Only one year ago, the Commission had rejected such a conclusion. The case of former Health Commissioner John Dalli has demonstrated the shortcomings very clearly. What I cannot understand are the conclusions drawn by the Commission from that experience. They suggest limiting the powers of the OLAF Director General. A 'Controller of Procedural Guarantees' should, according to the Commission proposal, instruct the Director General on how to deal with members of the EU institutions. This would be the end of OLAF as an independent body," said Gräßle. "Further to that, it is ridiculous to extend the Controller's competence to Heads of State and Government and to the Council of Ministers. One cannot circumvent the principle of immunity."

"Moreover, it is absolutely unclear what would be the means of appeal against a Controller who is at the same time an investigative authority. What is also unacceptable is the overlapping of competences of the Controller and the OLAF Supervisory Committee. Besides, this would lead to additional costs of around one million euros per year."

"It is obvious that Parliament will have to amend this proposal substantially," said Gräßle. "Otherwise, I will have to recommend to colleagues to reject what is on the table. As it stands now, it would pave the way for a new 'Santer scandal'."

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