

**EXCLUSIVE**

# European public prosecutor slashes original headcount

Document shows initial agreement included 90 additional positions

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The EPPO will move to Kirchberg in November 2020

**Photo: Pierre Matgé**

A newly created body to investigate crimes against the budget of the European Union has heavily scaled down staff already before opening in Luxembourg next year, two people familiar with the situation said.

The European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) was initially meant to have 118 full-time jobs, plus up to 90 positions transferred from the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) in Brussels, according to a 2015 agreement, which was seen by the *Luxembourg Times*.

But the new institution is now only recruiting around 117 staff in total, and not the additional 90 positions originally foreseen, according to an official at EPPO, who asked not to be named.

"The European Parliament decided to give less than originally planned to the EPPO," he said. "In the final agreement they decided to give 117. That 117 entails some transferred from OLAF."

The original staffing plans were outlined in a letter dated 24 December 2015 from Foreign Affairs minister Jean Asselborn to Kristalina Georgieva, then vice president of the European Commission.

OLAF staff are of particular interest to EPPO due to an overlap in skills between the two organisations. While OLAF currently relays some judicial matters to national bodies, it will pass them on to EPPO once the latter will have opened in November next year.

The EPPO official said the organisation is advertising positions and expects applications also from national administrations, public bodies, police forces and judicial experts from across Europe.

He said he could not say why the scaling down happened, but that European Parliament and Council tend to weigh "global, including political and budgetary questions" when approving agreements.

## Luxembourg too costly

However, Miguel Vicente-Nunez, president of Union Syndicale Luxembourg – a trade union for EU institution staff in Luxembourg – told the *Luxembourg Times* it would have been difficult to convince OLAF staff to move from Brussels to Luxembourg.

He said the problem stems from an ongoing battle between the union and EU institutions over salary gaps in Luxembourg and Brussels. Staff working at most institutions earn the same wages – within their pay grid – whether they are based in Luxembourg or Brussels.

The cost of living in Luxembourg is higher, mainly driven by extortionate real estate prices, making the Grand Duchy less attractive than the Belgian capital, Vicente-Nunez said.

"EPPO will need people with judicial experience and I don't think people are going to want to move to Luxembourg from Brussels," he said. "It's difficult to attract employees to Luxembourg and it's hard to retain them.

"We need to have a correcting coefficient or else in a few years there will be even less interest. We are worried about the quality of the European public service in Luxembourg."

The EPPO official said this is a "general issue for many people from other EU countries and in particular Brussels" and agreed it could be down to the salary and cost of living factor.

Nevertheless, he was confident, EPPO would be able to attract enough people. "There's a lot of interest out there," he said.

The Commission recently carried out a survey which showed Luxembourg's cost of living was 10% higher than in Brussels, Vicente-Nunez said. The union have now asked for a meeting with prime minister Xavier Bettel to gain support for its attempt to push for higher wages.

EPPO will recruit progressively over the next five years and by the end of this year it is expecting to recruit around 30 staff, in particular administrative positions and HR, budgetary and IT roles. The 22 European prosecutors should also be selected by the end of the year.