



**TARKÓ ÁRON**  
INFORMATION · STRATEGY · PROTECTION

FREE PROFESSIONAL GUIDE

# 10 Things Every European Investigator Must Know

*Based on real investigative methods, academic research and active European field practice. Practical principles for investigators, analysts, journalists and security professionals working in a European context.*

OSINT

HUMINT

GDPR AWARE

[tarko-investigations.com](https://tarko-investigations.com)

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# Who wrote this guide?

## TARKÓ ÁRON

Investigator · Analyst · Trainer

Áron Tarkó is a European investigative professional with hands-on experience in open-source intelligence, background research, corporate due diligence and cross-border information gathering. His work spans multiple European jurisdictions and sectors, combining analytical rigour with a strong awareness of legal and ethical boundaries.

He developed the principles in this guide through real casework, academic research and direct engagement with the investigative and security community across Europe. His approach is grounded in one conviction: that professional investigation must be both effective and defensible.

### Areas of expertise

OSINT

HUMINT

Due Diligence

GDPR Compliance

Cross-border EU

Risk Assessment

*“The strongest investigators are not the ones who find the most — they are the ones who can prove what they found.”*

— Tarkó Áron

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# A practical mindset for European investigative work

This guide is intentionally concise. It is not a legal manual and it is not a complete training programme. It is a practical orientation document: a set of principles that help investigators think clearly before collecting, analysing and reporting information.

The strongest investigators combine curiosity with restraint. They know how to search, but also when to stop. They understand technology, but they do not forget human judgement. They work fast when needed, but they verify before they conclude.

## Inside this guide

- 10 professional principles
- European legal and ethical awareness
- OSINT, HUMINT and documentation mindset
- Practical takeaways for immediate use



## READ

Learn the 10 principles



## APPLY

Use the field checklist



## GO DEEPER

Course, book or consultation



## 10 Principles at a glance

- 01 Information is power – but only if verified.
- 02 OSINT is the foundation, not the whole building.
- 03 Legal and ethical boundaries are part of the method.
- 04 Documentation wins cases.
- 05 Human intelligence still matters.
- 06 Patterns reveal what isolated facts hide.
- 07 Europe is not one jurisdiction.
- 08 Digital traces rarely disappear completely.
- 09 Timing can decide the value of the investigation.
- 10 Reputation is an investigator's strongest asset.

### Quick field checklist

- Define the question before collecting data.
- Separate facts from assumptions.
- Record source, date and context.
- Verify legality before acting.
- Look for patterns, not just events.
- Write findings so others can verify them.



FIELD PRINCIPLE

# Information is power - but only if verified.



*The most valuable investigator is not the one who collects the most data, but the one who filters truth from noise.*

Modern investigations produce more signals than any individual can process: open sources, databases, interviews, documents, images, social profiles, company records and digital traces. The professional task is not simply to gather information. It is to test it. Verification means comparing sources, checking chronology, identifying the origin of a claim and separating direct evidence from interpretation. A report built on unverified material may look impressive, but it will collapse under pressure. A concise, verified finding is worth more than a hundred uncertain screenshots.

## Practical takeaways

- Use at least two independent sources for key claims.
- Separate facts, assumptions and open questions in every note.
- Keep a clear audit trail of where each finding came from.



FIELD PRINCIPLE



# OSINT is the foundation, not the whole building.

# 2

*Open-source intelligence gives speed, scale and context – but it must be combined with judgement.*

OSINT is often the first layer of a European investigation. It helps map people, companies, networks, events, online presence and public records. Yet OSINT alone can create a false sense of certainty. Public data may be outdated, intentionally misleading or incomplete. Good investigators use OSINT to build hypotheses, not to replace investigative reasoning. The strongest work combines online research, document review, local context, legal awareness and, where appropriate, discreet field verification.

### Practical takeaways

- Use OSINT to structure the question before drawing conclusions.
- Do not confuse public visibility with reliability.
- Document search terms, dates and screenshots carefully.



FIELD PRINCIPLE



3

# Legal and ethical boundaries are part of the method.

*In Europe, professional investigation must respect privacy, proportionality and national legal limits.*

A result obtained in the wrong way may damage the client, the investigator and the case. European work requires attention to GDPR, local licensing rules, consent, legitimate interest, data minimisation and the purpose of processing. The question is not only what can be found, but whether it should be collected, stored and reported. Ethical discipline is a commercial advantage: serious clients need information that can be used responsibly, not risky material that creates future liability.

## Practical takeaways

- Define the lawful purpose of the investigation before collecting data.
- Collect only what is relevant to the objective.
- Never promise results that require unlawful or unethical methods.



FIELD PRINCIPLE



# Documentation wins cases.

# 4

*If it is not documented, it becomes memory. Memory is not enough.*

Every serious investigation depends on a disciplined record. Dates, times, URLs, source names, screenshots, file hashes, interview notes and decision points must be captured in a structured way. Good documentation allows another professional to understand how the conclusion was reached. It protects the investigator from accusations of speculation and helps the client act with confidence. A strong final report begins with disciplined notes on day one.

## Practical takeaways

- Use consistent file naming and timestamps.
- Keep original evidence separate from working copies.
- Write notes as if a third party may later review them.



FIELD PRINCIPLE



5

# Human intelligence still matters.

*Technology can reveal traces, but people reveal meaning.*

Databases and digital tools are powerful, but many important answers remain human. Local knowledge, professional networks, interviews, observation and contextual understanding can clarify what documents cannot. HUMINT does not mean pressure or manipulation. In a professional context, it means lawful, respectful and purposeful communication. The investigator must listen carefully, compare statements and evaluate motivation, memory and credibility.

## Practical takeaways

- Prepare questions before contact, but adapt to the conversation.
- Record what was said, by whom and under what circumstances.
- Treat human sources with discretion and respect.



FIELD PRINCIPLE



6

# Patterns reveal what isolated facts hide.

*A single event may be coincidence. Repetition may be structure.*

Investigations often involve fragmented information: a company change, a travel pattern, an online interaction, an invoice, a deleted profile, a repeated address. Alone, each item may mean little. Together, they may reveal behaviour, networks or risk. Pattern analysis requires patience. The investigator should build timelines, relationship maps and event clusters before making claims. The goal is to identify what repeats, what changes and what does not fit.

## Practical takeaways

- Create a timeline early and update it constantly.
- Map entities: people, companies, addresses, domains and accounts.
- Look for contradictions as carefully as confirmations.



FIELD PRINCIPLE



# Europe is not one jurisdiction.

# 7

*Cross-border work requires cultural, legal and administrative awareness.*

European investigations often move across borders quickly: a company in one country, a bank account in another, a residence in a third and online activity everywhere. Public registers differ, privacy expectations differ and professional licensing rules differ. A method that is acceptable in one country may be inappropriate elsewhere. The investigator must understand the operating environment before acting. International work is not only about language – it is about legal and cultural precision.

## Practical takeaways

- Check local rules before field activity or data collection.
- Use local partners when language or legal context requires it.
- Avoid assuming that one European procedure works everywhere.



FIELD PRINCIPLE

# Digital traces rarely disappear completely.

# 8

*The internet changes, but traces often remain in archives, metadata, mirrors and records.*

Profiles are deleted, websites are redesigned and posts disappear. Still, traces may remain in search caches, web archives, company filings, image metadata, usernames, domain history, linked accounts and third-party references. The investigator must act quickly but carefully. Capturing digital material properly is essential, because a live page today may be gone tomorrow. Preservation is as important as discovery.

## Practical takeaways

- Capture URLs, timestamps and full-page screenshots.
- Check archived versions and domain history where relevant.
- Preserve context, not only the isolated screenshot.



FIELD PRINCIPLE

# Timing can decide the value of the investigation.

# 9

*The right information late may no longer be useful.*

Some investigations are urgent because risks evolve: fraud, asset movement, reputational damage, travel, company restructuring or online deletion. A good investigator identifies what must be secured immediately and what can wait. Time management also protects quality. Rushed work creates errors, while slow work may miss opportunities. Professional judgement lies in sequencing tasks: preserve volatile evidence first, verify key facts next and expand only where necessary.

## Practical takeaways

- Identify volatile evidence at the beginning.
- Agree on urgent, important and optional tasks with the client.
- Do not sacrifice verification for speed unless the risk is clearly explained.



FIELD PRINCIPLE



# Reputation is an investigator's strongest asset.

# 10

*Discretion, accuracy and restraint build long-term trust.*

Private investigation is a trust profession. Clients may approach investigators during sensitive, stressful or high-stakes situations. The professional response must be calm, confidential and realistic. Reputation is built through accurate reporting, clear limits, lawful conduct and measured communication. A serious investigator does not dramatize findings or sell certainty where none exists. Long-term credibility matters more than a single dramatic result.

## Practical takeaways

- Communicate uncertainty honestly.
- Protect client confidentiality at every stage.
- Build reports that are useful, proportionate and defensible.



# You have the principles. Now choose your next step.

Whether you represent an educational institution, a professional organisation, or you are pursuing your own professional development, meaningful collaboration begins with a simple conversation.

Let's explore how these principles can create value within your own environment.

## PRINCIPLE 11



### Relationships create opportunities.

The most valuable professional opportunities often begin with curiosity and a single conversation.

Knowledge opens doors.  
Collaboration creates impact.



### EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

Bring practical investigative expertise into the classroom.

- ✔ Guest lectures and seminars
- ✔ Student workshops
- ✔ University collaborations
- ✔ Curriculum enrichment opportunities

EXPLORE EDUCATIONAL  
COLLABORATION →



### PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Deliver valuable content to your members and communities.

- ✔ Conference presentations
- ✔ Tailored webinars
- ✔ Association partnerships
- ✔ Continuing education initiatives

DISCUSS PARTNERSHIP  
OPPORTUNITIES →

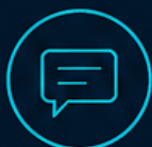


### INDIVIDUAL PROFESSIONALS

Strengthen your investigative mindset and capabilities.

- ✔ Practical European perspective
- ✔ Career development support
- ✔ Self-paced learning opportunities
- ✔ Access to future educational resources

DISCOVER LEARNING  
OPPORTUNITIES →



### Let's continue the conversation.

Interested in exploring collaboration opportunities?  
Visit our contact page to start a conversation.



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