



EUROPEAN UNION

Joint Meeting of the three Permanent Council Committees

Thematic meeting on combatting corruption and strengthening good governance

9 July 2021

EU Statement

Fighting corruption and combatting organised crime, while protecting human rights and fostering inclusive growth, remains a priority for the EU and we welcome the opportunity to discuss this important issue today. The European Union and its Member States would like to thank the Swedish Chairpersonship for organising this Joint Committee Meeting, which allows us to look at the topic of corruption and good governance through a cross-dimensional perspective.

Corruption represents a threat to security, as well as to democracy. It disproportionately affects women, as well as vulnerable groups, who are often the most dependent on public services. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing challenges and often brought about new corrupt practices that further undermine public trust.

The fight against the multidimensional phenomenon of corruption is relevant from the perspective of all three dimensions of the OSCE:

Starting with the first – politico-military - dimension:

The current COVID-19 crisis, has created a favourable environment for criminal activities and generated new opportunities for corruption to grow. It has also demonstrated the agility of organised criminal groups. The EU is convinced that, by depriving criminals of their illicit gains and ensuring that “crime doesn’t pay”, we

can disrupt their criminal activities. We need to intensify investigations and prosecutions, facilitate proactive financial and intelligence-led investigations, asset recovery, freezing and confiscation of profits.

To promote systematic use of financial investigations and enhance operational support, the EU has launched a new European Financial and Economic Crime Centre in Europol in June 2020. In April this year, the EU has also launched a new 5-year strategy to tackle organised crime as a key security threat. It targets the main criminal markets and seeks to address corruption and the financial aspects of organised crime.

In relation to the second – economic and environmental – dimension:

Governments are trying to recover from crisis by spending rapidly to get economies back on track, provide emergency support and procure medical supplies. Measures to promote transparency and accountability in the management of public finances, including public procurement procedures, are essential. As recognised in the Ministerial Council decision on Combatting Corruption through Increased Transparency and Digitalization, we should utilise the potential of digital technologies and open data in our fight against corruption.

Transparency needs to be accompanied by efficient oversight mechanisms. The EU funds that support recovery from the pandemic have built-in mechanisms to prevent any kind of fraud, corruption, and conflict of interest. In addition, the independent European Public Prosecutor's Office tasked to fight crimes against the EU budget launched its operations on 1 June 2021.

Finally, the third – human - dimension:

An effective approach to fighting corruption must rely on a combination of crime prevention and criminal justice responses, as well as international cooperation in criminal matters, while fully respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. A strong legal basis and implementation of the right of access to public information is a foundation for transparent public institutions and is essential for gaining public trust.

To fight corruption we need to uphold the rule of law. This requires strong legal frameworks with independent and impartial institutions. To foster a rule of law culture, the EU has established a new rule of law monitoring mechanism, with the EU Rule of Law report published last year for the first time.

In addition to these multidimensional perspectives of corruption, there are also horizontal elements:

One is a necessity for strong capacity building - anti-corruption, law enforcement and judicial authorities must be regularly trained and have sufficient resources to successfully investigate, prosecute and convict corruption and corruption-related offences.

Another is a multi-stakeholder approach. Continuous constructive and inclusive dialogue with civil society and the private sector on combatting corruption is crucial, as is the role of free and independent media, which can shine a light on inefficiency and malpractice. The EU supports a safe and enabling environment for whistle-blowers, and condemns all attacks on those who work to expose corruption.

We believe that the cross-dimensional approach is crucial when tackling corruption and enhancing good governance on local, national and international level. However, we all know that words are not enough, we have to focus on implementing our commitments and beyond, through targeted actions to prevent corruption and shrinking the space for corrupt practices - through building capacities, raising awareness, enhancing transparency, and the use of digital technologies.

We are looking forward to the EEDIM for the opportunity to look back and discuss the progress achieved, but mainly the work that is still ahead of us, in the area of combating corruption and strengthening good governance, and thereby also supporting rule of law, just and inclusive growth, gender-equality and public trust.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.