



EU anti-corruption report: Bridging law and reality?

The European Commission [presented](#) on 6 June 2011 a set of measures to help Member States enforce laws and international obligations against corruption. The Commission is to publish a regular report, setting a precedent for EU-wide monitoring of anti-corruption practices. Its impact will depend on the balance of power between supporters of a stronger EU role against corruption and governments reluctant to expose themselves to scrutiny and criticism.

New momentum

The Commission's "package" of measures comes in response to a call from the Council for anti-corruption indicators and a comprehensive policy, in cooperation with the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), the OECD, and the United Nations. Such efforts are envisaged in the EU's [Stockholm programme](#), which sets out priorities in the area of justice, freedom and security up to 2014.

The package comprises a communication, a decision establishing the EU anti-corruption reporting mechanism, as well as reports on private-sector corruption and EU participation in GRECO. The new EU anti-corruption report will complement existing mechanisms such as GRECO which, the Commission now argues, have failed to generate sufficient political will at national level. The Commission had in 2003 [advised](#) against a separate EU monitoring mechanism to avoid duplication.

EU anti-corruption report

Starting in 2013, the Commission will issue a [report](#) every two years to identify "failures and vulnerabilities" across the Member States (MS). It will offer non-binding recommendations on actual anti-corruption practices, not only on formally adopted laws and policies.

The Commission argues that greater resolve in implementing anti-corruption measures will help rebuild confidence in financial markets. Seventy-eight percent of [Eurobarometer](#) respondents agree that corruption is a major problem for their country (ranging from 95% in

Greece to 22% in Denmark). According to the Commission, corruption needs to be addressed at EU level as it is a cross-border problem that distorts competition and affects mutual trust among MS.

However, several MS have shown little enthusiasm. Some have not yet ratified international conventions against corruption.

Precedent

So far, the Commission has reported on anti-corruption measures in candidate countries. Monitoring continued in Bulgaria and Romania after they joined the EU in 2007, through a [cooperation and verification mechanism](#). Since accession, nine reports by the Commission have maintained some pressure on Sofia and Bucharest to fight corruption. However, critics claim that the results have been uneven.

Positions

In a 2009 [resolution](#) and 2010 [written declaration](#), the European Parliament insisted on a robust fight against corruption based on periodic evaluation of MS efforts. Transparency International [welcomed](#) the Commission's package as a first step but called for a more coherent and comprehensive anti-corruption strategy to encompass all EU policies.

Prospects

It remains to be seen how bold the Commission report will be in "naming and shaming" Member States and to what extent it can pressure them into action. Much hinges on the structure of the future reports, to be drafted both by theme and by country.

The reports will not rely only on government-provided data. The Commission plans to build its own network of correspondents in each MS to gain insights into high-level corruption cases, judicial procedures, and irregularities in the allocation of EU and national funds.

In addition, the Commission will present proposals on confiscation and recovery of criminal assets, and on improving the investigation of financial crime.