



FRANS TIMMERMANS
First Vice-President

Brussels, 25 JAN. 2017
ARES (2017)455202

Dear Chairman,

During our last structured dialogue, I promised to come back to inform you of our plans for the continuation of our anti-corruption work.

As you rightly stressed, over the past years the Commission has strengthened the EU anti-corruption framework, including through Member State-by-Member State analysis of the challenges experienced and the actions taken. The EU anti-corruption report published in 2014 pulled these threads together and has served as the basis for dialogues with individual Member States and as a useful background for wider debate on the issue both at EU level and in individual Member States.

This work has been deepened and evolved further, for instance through an anti-corruption experience-sharing programme for Member States experts launched in 2015. In 2015 and 2016, over 200 national experts participated in a total of six such workshops on asset disclosure, whistle-blower protection, healthcare corruption, local public procurement, private sector corruption, and political immunities. Further workshops are planned for 2017 and beyond; they will provide a forum for exchanging information on the implementation of anti-corruption policies. Moreover, national contact points have been established in all Member States to facilitate information exchange on anti-corruption policy between the national and EU levels.

The fruits of our anti-corruption work can be seen in concrete examples of Member States taking legislative or other action to prevent and counter corruption. The Commission has also been providing financing for projects in the area of anti-corruption as an important element in administrative capacity building.

During this period the wider policy framework at EU level has evolved in a number of ways. Most importantly, fighting corruption has become a key element of the European semester process of economic governance, where a number of the country reports now include specific analysis of corruption risks and associated challenges. In relevant cases, these issues have also been reflected in country specific recommendations under the Semester; recommendations which have been endorsed by the European Council. Taking up anti-corruption matters in the context of the main economic policy dialogue between the Member

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States and EU institutions is in line with the general approach of this Commission to streamline processes and focus on key issues in the relevant fora.

Corruption is a key issue in several Member States, and its economic and social significance makes it essential that this is properly reflected in the European semester process. At the same time, this raises the question of whether the format adopted in 2014 is still necessary today. While the first report was useful in providing an analytical overview and creating a basis for further work, this does not necessarily mean that a continued succession of similar reports in the future would be the best way to proceed.

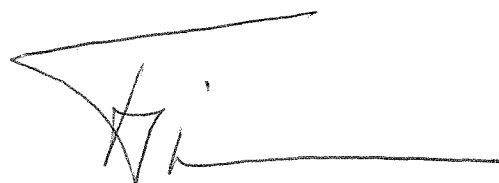
Given the complexity and evolving nature of corruption and its prevention, a more efficient and versatile approach would therefore be to complement the continued focus given to corruption issues in the European semester with operational activities to share experience and best practices among Member States' authorities and actively working in a wider context alongside international organisations such as the UN, Council of Europe, the OECD, G7 and others who are engaged in valuable anti-corruption work, as well as private stakeholders and civil society organisations.

This work goes hand in hand with action at EU level in targeted areas where the EU can make a difference. For example, the Commission is currently assessing the need for further steps on whistle-blower protection at EU level. European legislation in other areas such as anti-money laundering and public procurement also makes an important contribution to the fight against corruption. Various measures have been taken or are under discussion to increase transparency, for example as concerns beneficial ownership and corporate tax transparency, or the contacts between EU decision-makers and interest representatives. Finally, I would like to mention the work to fight fraud and corruption risks in the implementation of EU funds. In this context, legislative action is also relevant, notable examples being the work to establish a European Public Prosecutor's Office and the recently agreed directive on the protection of the financial interests of the EU.

To conclude, I would like to stress that the Commission remains fully convinced of the need to combat and prevent corruption and is committed to continuing its work in this field. It is in the common interest to ensure that all Member States have effective anti-corruption policies and that the EU supports the Member States in pursuing this work. An effective fight against corruption within the EU remains essential – delivered through the right vehicle. The Commission will also continue to be fully engaged in order to ensure the integrity of our institutions and policies as well as the protection of taxpayer money flowing through the EU budget. I am pleased that the LIBE Committee is also active in keeping attention on this important issue, and am therefore looking forward to continuing our dialogue on ways to strengthen our common anti-corruption work.

To ensure inter-institutional transparency, I am also sending this letter to the Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU).

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frans Timmermans', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Frans TIMMERMANS