

Transparency International EU

The global coalition against corruption

Corruption and the ‘arc of instability’

Carl Dolan · Thursday, April 7th, 2016

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The late, fantastic novelist Gabriel García Márquez once wrote that ‘the most important thing in a good marriage is not happiness, but stability.’ There seems to be little in the way of happiness when it comes to this marriage of states we call the European Union. Until recently, stability had been the governing factor maintaining this matrimony. But the EU seems ever more surrounded by chaos and crises that threaten this stability.

There is an arc of instability that surrounds Europe. A resurgent Russia and struggling Ukraine to the east; a North Africa increasingly feeling the heat of climate change and crop failure; and shifting borders in a Middle East engulfed by the flames of war. This surrounding instability puts at risk Europe’s unity, economy and politics. Yet the EU struggles to react with speed and a coherent voice.

That is why the EU is currently reviewing a ‘[Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy](#) to guide the European Union’s global actions in the future.’ This strategy hopes to forge a stronger and more effective EU foreign policy in light of our rapidly-changing world. Federica Mogherini, the EU’s foreign affairs chief, is asking for [input](#) on this strategy. As the Director of Transparency International EU, myself and my colleague Katherine Dixon have submitted our own [series of recommendations](#) on how the EU should shape its Global Strategy. At the root of all the challenges Europe and the world faces lies one constant: corruption.

Corruption [fuels conflict](#). It adds to armed violence and undermines peace initiatives. Money laundering and illicit asset flows assist arms dealers and [people smugglers](#). Bribery feeds [inequality](#) and slows development. Corruption encourages [illegal logging](#) and deforestation, worsening climate change. It adds to hunger, poverty and inequality, and [helps drive](#) the migration crisis.

The [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), of which the EU is a signatory, acknowledge that ending poverty, hunger and climate change is not possible without tackling instability and weak governance. If the EU is serious in its commitments for a sustainable future, it must make fighting corruption a priority in all future endeavours including its Global Strategy.

That’s why it is vital that the EU be extremely cautious in pursuing close relations with corrupt governments. That includes seemingly politically-stable governments that may appear to be an alternative to anarchy, instability and terror. Corrupt but stable governments might seem like suitable short-term partners, but Tunisia, Libya and Ukraine have all shown that is unsustainable.

The EU must ensure coherence and transparency in its foreign and security aid. EU foreign policy and aid to conflict areas and fragile states should focus on supporting local communities rather than *ad hoc* aid programmes based on the politics of the time, which often end with funding in the wrong hands. International spending in fragile states must be carefully scrutinised, monitored and reported on to ensure those funds indeed reach their intended recipients.

What's more, the EU needs to maintain and increase the social cost of corruption. Policies and actions need to show that the EU does not welcome impunity or provide safe havens for the corrupt from abroad. The EU has recently renewed sanctions against both Tunisia's Ben Ali and Ukraine's Yanukovich. This is welcome, but sanctions should be part of a long-term strategy to shut out the corrupt.

The EU must also take responsibility for the proceeds of corruption. Corrupt cash flows through Europe. It's in our banks, in London properties in Kensington and Chelsea, in yachts and hotels. Each year, huge sums of money are siphoned through the EU out of countries with endemic levels of corruption. Anti-money laundering provisions must be utilised. Stemming the flow of corrupt cash in Europe is one of the best ways of stopping the devastating effects of corruption abroad.

The EU must build anti-corruption and governance efforts into its foreign and security policy. Good governance and a world free from bribery and corruption are vital for security and stability at home and abroad. The arc of instability surrounding Europe need not end this marriage. The EU must look long and hard into the causes of this instability. Fighting corruption lies at the core of the challenges we all face.

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