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## EU anti-corruption report – no answers please, we’re the Commission

Carl Dolan · Wednesday, May 10th, 2017

When people complain about the lack of accountability in the EU, it’s possible they have in mind the purported ‘democratic deficit’ inherent in a multi-level governance system. More likely they are thinking of the impossibility of getting a straight answer from the right person.

It is this kind of accountability deficit that was on display in, of all places, the European Parliament’s Civil Liberties (LIBE) committee last Thursday, where the European Commission was in the dock for its decision to scrap the EU anti-corruption report – a report on the progress Member States are making in the fight against corruption (see our blogs [here](#) and [here](#)).

This was a political decision. We know because of [this note](#) of a meeting that took place late last year which was attended by the head of Dimitri Avramopolous’s cabinet, Diane Schmitt; Timmermans’ deputy head of cabinet, Michelle Sutton; and the member of Juncker’s cabinet responsible for Justice and Home Affairs, Michael Shotter. And it was Timmermans name on the [letter informing Parliament](#) of the decision. When it came to the LIBE committee, however, it was a senior official from DG Home Affairs, Olivier Onidi, that was wheeled out to face the music.

So much for the right person. How about a straight answer? There was no consultation on the decision to shelve the report, not even with the Commission’s [own expert group](#), despite the fact that Onidi even admitted during the hearing that the Commission should have consulted the Parliament beforehand. So you might think that the Commission would be at pains to clarify at reasoning and to set out plans for the future. A forlorn hope.

The assembled MEPs did their damndest. Ana Gomes, Sylvie Guillaume, Sophie Int’Veldt, Benedek Javor, Claude Moraes and Elly Schlein pressed Onidi with a series of pertinent questions and observations. There are so many Commission reports on so many topics, why shelve this one? How will the European Parliament be involved in Commission’s future monitoring plans? Has the 2011 Commission decision to establish the report been formally rescinded and which Commissioners were involved? How did this decision happen politically, was there pressure from Member States?

No replies were forthcoming. Instead Onidi stuck to the Commission line that the annual dialogue with Member States on economic policies – the ‘European Semester’ – is the best forum to take this forward.

It is not. The European Semester process is a wholly inadequate replacement for the Anti-Corruption report. For a start, corruption has only been explicitly raised with a small number of countries as part of that process (i.e. [the usual suspects](#) in Eastern and Southern Europe) rather than the 28 that are examined in the report. It also only addresses those aspects of corruption that have an impact on growth and competitiveness, leaving aside issues that have an impact on governance or rule of law, such as illegal political party financing. Perhaps most importantly, as Sophie Int’Veldt pointed out, it gives the impression that fighting corruption is a bureaucratic exercise, to be conducted largely behind closed doors, rather than a deeply political exercise that require a visible and vocal presence.

This retreat to the bureaucratic comfort zone is at odds with President Juncker’s desire for a ‘more political Commission’. There was a heartfelt plea from Onidi at the hearing “not see in the decision not to publish the report as a lack of commitment to fighting corruption”. But in the absence of any plans to replace the report with a more effective instrument or strategy, it is difficult to see this as anything else but the Commission brushing uncomfortable anti-corruption commitments under the carpet.

\*\*Update: moments before publishing this post we received [this response](#) from the head of Timmermans’ cabinet to our original letter sent in March. As this simply restates the points made in the letter to the European Parliament in January, and does not address any of the specific points we raised in our letter, this does not unfortunately provide the answers or reassurances we are seeking, much as we are grateful to the Commission for finally acknowledging the concerns of the 56 anti-corruption CSOs who wrote.

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