

Mr Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President of the European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels

Brussels, 24 March 2017

Dear First Vice-President Timmermans,

On the eve of the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, we urge the European Commission not to abandon its leadership role in fighting the scourge of corruption in the EU.

The authors of the EU's founding treaty were resolved to "eliminate the barriers which divide Europe". Sixty years later, corruption remains one of the main barriers to realising the original vision of a polity built on the rule of law, democratic cooperation and a fair and merit-based economy. Corruption is a barrier to increased investment and economic growth, to more sustainable development, to improved security, to enhanced trust in institutions and to completion of the single market. Perhaps most importantly, it also fuels the growing inequality that is one of the biggest barriers that divide the people of Europe today.

The EU has a long history of promoting good governance, the rule of law and anti-corruption reform, most notably as part of the enlargement process. The reforms enacted as a condition of membership have undoubtedly helped reduce corruption and improved the lot of hundreds of millions of citizens who directly bear the costs. These reforms have also inspired similar initiatives across the Union, as no Member State has remained untouched by serious and high-level corruption scandals.

These gains are clearly fragile and reversible. They need constant attention and renewal. For these reasons, we were profoundly disappointed to learn of your decision to end the European Commission's commitment to a biennial anti-corruption report for all Member States.

Your letter to the Chair of the European Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee (25th January 2017) indicates that some of the objectives of this report will be pursued through the European Semester process. This is welcome, but is not a substitute for an instrument that deals with both the governance and economic aspects of corruption in all Member States. Corruption was only referenced in eight country-specific recommendations as part of the 2016 European Semester: the implication appears to be that corruption is only serious enough to warrant a policy response in those countries addressed.

Moreover, without the report and the underlying analysis, we are concerned that the Commission lacks the ability to deal systematically with new and emerging issues.

The letter also refers to a number of areas where the Commission has introduced targeted measures that will make a contribution to the fight against corruption. These are also welcome, but without the report the Commission lacks any instrument or strategy to guide future EU anti-corruption policy. We are still waiting for the "comprehensive anti-corruption strategy" requested by Member States in 2009 as part of the Stockholm Programme. Such strategies are a standard feature of national policy-making.

The decision is at odds with the clear commitments in the letter to progress the fight against corruption, with the prominent emphasis placed on anti-corruption reforms in the enlargement process, with the EU's international commitments as a signatory to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Convention Against Corruption, and indeed the public statements of the President of the Commission.

We therefore would like to seek a meeting with you as early as possible to understand better the rationale for discontinuing the report, and to hear the Commission's plans for regaining its role as an anti-corruption champion in a manner that will enable the EU to complete its founding mission.

Yours sincerely,

Access Info Europe

Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN)

Anticor Belgium

Anti-Corruption Trust of Southern Africa

Centre national de coopération au développement: CNCD-11.11.11

Civio: Fundacion Ciudadana

Corruption Watch

Ekvilib Institute

European Movement International

European Network Against Racism (ENAR)

Fair-play Alliance

Fundacja ePanstwo

Fundacja Frank Bold

Global Witness

GONG

Greenpeace

Health Care Without Harm (HCWH)

Instytut Spraw Publicznych/Institute of Public Affairs

Journalism++

Kairos Europe

K-Monitor

Open Society European Policy Institute

Open State Foundation

Oxfam

SELDI: Southeast European Leadership for Development and Integrity

Sieć Obywatelska Watchdog (Citizen Watchdog) Polska

SLOGA: Slovenian Global Action

Spinwatch

Stefan Batory Foundation (Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego)

The Good Lobby

Transparency International Austria

Transparency International Belgium

Transparency International Bulgaria

Transparency International Cyprus

Transparency International Czech Republic

Transparency International Denmark

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