



Anti-corruption: Stronger rules to fight corruption in the EU and worldwide

Brussels, 3 May 2023

Today, the Commission is taking decisive action to fight corruption in the EU and worldwide, delivering on the commitment made by President **von der Leyen** in her 2022 State of the Union address.

The anti-corruption proposals presented today represent **a milestone in the fight against corruption** at national and EU level. The Commission will step up its action: building on measures in place, strengthening efforts to **integrate the prevention of corruption into the design of EU policies and programs**, and **actively supporting Member States' work** to put in place strong anti-corruption policies and legislation. Through its annual **Rule of Law Report cycle**, the Commission also monitors anti-corruption developments at national level, identifies challenges and issues of **recommendations to Member states**.

Today's set of measures include new and strengthened rules **criminalising corruption offences** and harmonising penalties across the EU, as well as a proposal from the High Representative, supported by the Commission, to establish a dedicated **Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) sanctions regime** to target serious acts of corruption worldwide. These new measures place a strong focus on **prevention and creating a culture of integrity**, in which corruption is not tolerated and at the same time, **strengthen enforcement tools**.

Key elements of today's proposals:

I. Communication on the fight against corruption

In a [Joint Communication](#), the Commission and the High Representative bring together existing work and develop new directions and new tools at both EU and Member State level, also feeding into a clear commitment to tackling corruption at the global level. An **EU network against corruption**, bringing together law enforcement, public authorities, practitioners, civil society and other stakeholders, will act as a catalyst for corruption prevention across the EU and will develop best practices and practical guidance. One key task of the Network will be to support the Commission **to map common areas where corruption risks are high across the EU**. The work of the Network will feed into an **EU anti-corruption strategy**, to be developed in consultation with the European Parliament and the Council, to maximise the impact and coherence of EU actions.

Within the EU institutions there is a zero tolerance towards corruption. The Communication details the ethical, integrity and transparency rules in place to prevent corruption within the EU institutions. This framework must not only be applied with rigour and consistency, but also be continually updated.

II. Stronger rules to fight corruption

The Commission is proposing a new [Directive on combating corruption](#). The proposal modernises the existing EU anti-corruption legal framework by:

a) Preventing corruption and building a culture of integrity

- **Raising awareness of corruption**, by carrying out information and awareness-raising campaigns, research, and education programmes to reduce corruption risks and offences.
- Ensuring that the **public sector is held accountable to the highest standards** by imposing an obligation on Member States to adopt effective rules on open access to information of public interest, the disclosure and management of conflicts of interests in the public sector, the disclosure and verification of assets of public officials and regulating the interaction between the private and the public sector.
- Setting up **specialised anti-corruption bodies** and ensuring adequate **resources and training** for authorities responsible for preventing and fight corruption.

b) One legal act for all corruption offences and sanctions

- **Harmonising definitions of criminal offences** prosecuted as corruption to cover not only bribery but also misappropriation, trading in influence, abuse of functions, as well as obstruction of justice and illicit enrichment related to corruption offences. The proposal makes all offences under the United Nations Convention against Corruption mandatory under EU law and brings together public and private sector corruption.
- **Increases the level of criminal sanctions** for natural and legal persons, and harmonises aggravating and mitigating circumstances.

c) Ensuring effective investigations and prosecution of corruption

- **Investigative tools:** Member States will have to ensure that law enforcement and prosecutors have appropriate investigative tools to fight corruption.
- **Immunity or privileges from investigation and prosecution:** Member States will have to ensure that privileges and immunity can be lifted during corruption investigations through an effective and transparent process pre-established by law, and in a timely manner.
- Introducing minimum rules on the **statute of limitation** to ensure sufficient time to bring corruption offences to justice.

III. Expanding the CFSP sanctions toolbox to cover serious acts of corruption

EU sanctions help to achieve key CSFP objectives such as preserving peace, strengthening international security, and consolidating and supporting democracy, international law and human rights. With today's proposal from the High Representative, supported by the Commission, **the EU will be able to target serious acts of corruption worldwide**, no matter where they occur. It will complement and enhance EU's internal and external instruments against corruption and show the EU's determination to use any tools, including CFSP sanctions, to fight it.

Next steps

The proposed Directive on combating corruption will have to be negotiated and adopted by the European Parliament and the Council before it can become EU law.

The proposed new framework of CFSP sanctions targeting corruption will have to be discussed and adopted by the Council.

Background

In her [2022 State of the Union](#) address, President von der Leyen set out the need for decisive action against corruption.

Corruption is highly damaging to society, to our democracies, to the economy and to individuals. It undermines the institutions on which we depend, diluting their credibility as well as their ability to deliver public policies and quality public services. It acts as an enabler for organised crime and hostile foreign interference. Successfully preventing and fighting corruption is essential both to safeguard EU values and the effectiveness of EU policies, and to maintain the rule of law and trust in those who govern and public institutions.

Corruption is by its nature difficult to quantify, but even conservative estimates suggest that it costs the EU economy at least €120 billion per year. The negative effects of corruption are felt worldwide, undercutting efforts to bring good governance and prosperity, and to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Global corruption indices put many EU Member States among the countries seen as the least corrupt in the world. However, corruption remains a key concern for people across the EU, with [Eurobarometer data](#) showing that in 2022, almost seven in ten Europeans (68%) believed that corruption was widespread in their country and only 31% were of the opinion that their government's efforts to combat corruption are effective.

For More Information

Questions and Answers: [Stronger rules to fight corruption in the EU and worldwide](#)

Factsheet: [Strengthening EU action to fight corruption](#)

[Joint Communication](#) to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee on the fight against corruption

[Proposal](#) for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating corruption by criminal law

Quotes:

Corruption is a global, transnational phenomenon that is estimated to cost the world at least 5% of its GDP. Corruption undermines democracy, the rule of law, human rights, peace and international security and sustainable development, at the same time that hinders the achievement of SDGs, in Europe and worldwide. This is why, in parallel to the Commission's initiatives to strengthen the fight against corruption within the EU, I am proposing to establish a new CFSP sanctions regime targeting serious acts of corruption worldwide, to complement our external anti-corruption toolbox. It is a clear proof of our determination to step up our action to prevent and fight corruption both within the EU and beyond, and to use all our instruments to that end. We are sending a clear message: the EU is not open for business to those who engage in corruption, wherever that occurs.
High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell - 03/05/2023

Corruption is like a cancer. If left to run rampant, it will suffocate our democratic society and destroy its institutions. Like with the cancer treatment, we need to improve prevention. We also need to have strong instruments of repression and penalties against corruption, not only at national level, but also at European level. Today's package will raise the bar for EU-wide definitions and penalties of corruption crimes and will help authorities to catch and punish the criminals, be it from public or private sector, no matter where they happen. In addition, promotion and long-term building of moral integrity of public officials will further narrow space for corruption in a healthy democratic society.
Věra Jourová, Vice-President for Values and Transparency - 03/05/2023

The untold toll of corruption on millions of people's lives is devastating and it must be the Union's relentless mission to root it out wherever it occurs. The new rules we are proposing today will raise the bar and extend criminal sanctions to a broader set of corruption offences across the EU. To succeed in the fight against corruption, we need to build a new culture of integrity that permeates every level of society.
Vice-President Margaritis Schinas - 03/05/2023

Corruption affects us all, damaging our societies, democratic institutions and our Union values. Corruption is also a threat to our security with 60% of organised crime groups using corruption. Now the European Commission is proposing a comprehensive set of corruption crimes to fight it where it hurts the corrupt the most. This proposal will cover the corruption crimes agreed internationally under the UN Convention Against Corruption. It will complement our recent new proposal on asset recovery and also help support a culture of integrity with activities for corruption prevention. It is also the first time that we bring public sector corruption and private sector corruption under one umbrella law. With this proposal we aim at tightening the net around the corrupt.
Ylva Johansson, Commissioner for Home Affairs - 03/05/2023

Serious acts of corruption pose a grave risk to democracy and the rule of law. Corruption often goes unpunished particularly when linked to those in power. Today, we propose to expand the EU's sanctions toolbox, to enable us to act and target those responsible for serious acts of corruption worldwide, no matter where they occur.
Mairead McGuinness, Commissioner for Financial Services, Financial Stability and Capital Markets Union - 03/05/2023

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