

# Foreword

There is a growing understanding that persistent poverty and the failure of democratic reform are linked to corruption, and to political corruption in particular. In light of the developing consensus in this area – reflected in a growing number of international and national documents addressing anti-corruption efforts – corruption has become a major concern both within the present European Union and among new candidates for membership. The Copenhagen criteria for EU accession and the European Commission’s annual Regular Reports evaluating candidate countries clearly reflect this concern.

The recognition that corruption restricts economic and political reform has particularly contributed to the willingness of East European States – in which the process of transition from centralised systems continues – to shape more effective institutional and policy tools with the potential to mitigate corruption.

In addition to the concerns of the international community, the EU, and individual States, the general public has a direct stake in reform. There is evidence that citizens in the candidate countries are well aware of the problem of corruption, and that they believe there is a need for practical anti-corruption measures, even though they may not necessarily agree with the moral criticisms of corruption that are sometimes raised.

However, the efforts taken against corruption in candidate States have often been merely formalistic, and indeed the Union’s own expectations about what States have to do to meet the requirements of membership in combating corruption have often been limited to the ratification of conventions, without soliciting more meaningful change. Yet without meaningful and continuing enforcement they will not lead to lasting improvements; indeed, there is even a danger that ineffective measures will undermine the credibility of all anti-corruption efforts.

It is in this regard that monitoring of national and international efforts to combat corruption is important. Governmental and public awareness of corruption and actions to fight it require not only coordination and intellectual guidance, but also independent external monitoring of corruption and anti-corruption policy. Public, independent monitoring and analysis of Government efforts that are intended to curb corruption as part of EU membership not only fulfil a traditional “watchdog” function, but also contribute to a better understanding of the complex social nature of corruption.

Without this understanding and policies based upon it Governments will inevitably fall short in their efforts. In some areas corruption can be effectively tackled by introducing proper administration and supervision; in other areas, such as healthcare, however, there can be no improvement without sector-wide structural reforms. Further, only a vigorous

democracy with a free press and committed citizenry can push a society and its political elite towards greater decency. Only if the majority knows what measures are being taken to reduce corruption and how they relate to an honest anti-corruption policy can the electorate evaluate politicians and bureaucracies and push them towards adopting transparent, genuine policies.

In order for the public to exert effective pressure and Governments to respond effectively, unbiased and systematic analysis of current problems is needed. This is the objective of the present project of the Open Society Institute. The methodology of the EU Accession Monitoring Program concentrates on the current structural shortcomings in a number of socio-economic sectors that are of fundamental importance for new or continuing EU membership – that is, those areas that are central to any meaningful understanding of what the Copenhagen political criteria require. As in the other areas the Program monitors, the corruption monitoring component follows a unified methodology that allows the findings to be used comparatively, without the ultimately futile exercise of ranking States and societies in terms of their alleged ‘corruptness.’

The country reports and the Overview accompanying them are a promising start to what is, by its nature, a long-term process. Even if all the measures that follow from the findings are implemented, the problem of corruption will not go away. Although technical measures such as conflict of interest rules or public procurement standards play a rightful part in any effective anti-corruption policy, the social complexity of corruption means that one cannot simply rely on measures transferred from current EU member States that have their own specific problems with corruption.

Indeed, one of the Project’s principal findings is that the EU itself lacks consistent or comprehensive anti-corruption policies. This in turn has made it more difficult for individual States, whether candidates or current members, to craft solutions that meet their own needs and those that reflect the shared values of the Union.

Of course, we may hope that the former communist countries will develop solutions tailored to their own specific circumstances, and at the same time, as these countries become members of the EU, we may reasonably expect levels of corruption to fall as their markets mature. However, even when societies become more affluent a deliberate political choice must be made to pay the social price of anti-corruption measures, even if that price is ultimately much lower than the social cost of corruption. The present volume is certainly a promising starting point for a social dialogue – both within the candidate countries and the Union as a whole – that can contribute to that choice.

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