First meeting of the EU network against corruption on 20 September 2023

Technical Report

DG HOME with the support of Ecorys

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Preface

With the EU anti-corruption package adopted on 03 May 2023, the European Commission elevated its actions to support Member States' anti-corruption policies and legislation, as well as to foster a common culture for addressing corruption. The European Commission also pledged to enhance its role in international forums and increased synergies among all stakeholders. The EU network against corruption was established to gather in one single forum national authorities, practitioners, civil society organizations, international organizations, EU agencies, and relevant services of the European Commission.

The Commission had outlined potential objectives for the EU network, including to provide a new impetus to corruption prevention efforts across the EU and to develop best practices and practical guidance in various areas of common interest. The EU network could also contribute to the European Commission's anti-corruption initiatives, such as the concrete deliverable of mapping high-risk corruption areas by 2024. The knowledge and best practices exchanged within the EU network, along with the mapping of high-risk areas in the EU, are intended to assist the development of the first EU strategy against corruption.

During this inaugural meeting of the EU network against corruption, participants came together to discuss its objectives and potential added value. This was followed by discussions on emerging trends and topics for more in-depth exchange in future meetings. In the afternoon, interactive dialogues were held on some of the good practices and trends identified in the 2023 Rule of Law report. Finally, participants were presented with funding opportunities for anti-corruption projects under the Technical Support Instrument (TSI), Erasmus+, and the Internal Security Fund.

1   Introduction

Ms. YLVA JOHANSSON, Commissioner for Home Affairs, opened this meeting with a video message in which she stated the need for us to unite forces to combat corruption. The Commissioner highlighted that the fight against corruption is a top EU priority. Nearly 70% of this year's Rule of Law Report is about fighting corruption. Member States are taking these recommendations seriously and followed up on two-thirds of last year's recommendation. The proposal for a Directive presented in May 2023 by the Commission aims to harmonise definitions of criminal offences prosecuted as corruption to cover not only bribery, making all offences under the United Nations Convention against Corruption mandatory under EU law.

She emphasised that it takes a network to fight a network. Commissioner Johansson underlined that corruption kills and criminals are becoming increasingly international, which is why we must collaborate within the EU and extend our efforts beyond our borders. In the EU there is a need for a centralised network to engage in discussions, exchange ideas, share plans and projects, develop best practices, and gather data to identify high-risk corruption areas.

Following this inspiring video message, Ms. EMILY O'REILLY, European Ombudsman, highlighted in her opening remarks the significance of combating corruption. The perception of corruption looms large, as evidenced by the Eurobarometer Survey, causing a decline in trust in the European Parliament. In her address, O'Reilly compared corruption to poison, highlighting its various forms and the different degrees of detectability. She also underlined the issue of revolving doors and referenced the work of the OECD on the topic of post-public employment.[1] As corruption poses a significant threat to democracies, O'Reilly called for a renewed "pan-European" conversation on the nature of corruption and mentioned the establishment of a new anti-corruption ethics body. She commended the establishment of the EU Network against corruption and expressed hope that this network could catalyse such a crucial discussion, fostering a shared vision among institutions. Such an effort, she noted, would be a substantial service rendered to European citizens.

The final opening remark came from Ms. Ramona Strugariu, a Member of the European Parliament and the rapporteur for the proposal for a Directive on combating corruption. In her address, she underscored that combating corruption remains a top priority in the EU. She referred to the Eurobarometer Survey, revealing that 70% of the EU population believes that corruption is widespread. She articulated the vision that the EU network against corruption should not merely be a passive presence but rather a dynamic force, serving to share best practices and empower allies. All these efforts should collectively work towards restoring trust among European citizens, particularly in a context of rising populism.

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[1] OECD (2010), Post-Public Employment: Good Practices for Preventing Conflict of Interest, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264056701-en.

2   Session 1: What can the EU network do for you?

This session started with a presentation by the Commission on the structure and objectives of the new EU network against corruption. The session was followed by interventions by selected speakers and a discussion with all participants. The session was moderated by an Ecorys employee.

2.1   European Commission, DG Home

A representative of the European Commission – DG HOME took the floor to explain the structure and objectives of the new EU network against corruption. This network is built upon existing groups. In the past years, DG HOME has organised 16 'experience-sharing workshops' with national authorities, as well as meetings with a collective of independent local experts from civil society and academia who supported the Commission in the context of the Rule of Law report. The EU network's purpose is to streamline and consolidate these groups under one umbrella, promoting greater coherence and, ideally, a more significant impact from the collective efforts of the EU network's members. Furthermore, the network aims to enhance inclusivity by inviting a broader range of stakeholders to the meetings, facilitating the sharing of good practices and guidance in different areas of common interests. This network will be a valuable catalyst in the fight against corruption and in discussing new ways of combatting corruption, including through technology. The presence of all relevant stakeholders simplifies reaching a wider audience for sharing ideas, plans, and projects, preventing duplication, and fostering complementarity in their efforts to combat corruption. Finally, the DG HOME representative emphasised the Commission's keen interest in hearing the opinions and thoughts of all participants regarding these developments.

2.2   UNCAC Coalition

Afterward, the UNCAC Coalition presented a view from civil society. The speaker began by introducing the UNCAC Coalition as a global civil society network comprising more than 350 organizations spanning over 100 countries, with 118 civil society organizations and experts affiliated in Europe. The speaker then proceeded to outline the current priorities of the organisation in Europe. These include advocating for the enactment of robust EU directives addressing anti-corruption, anti-money laundering, and asset recovery, as well as pushing for the establishment of stronger legal and policy frameworks, such as whistle-blower protection. Towards the end of the presentation, the speaker suggested potential areas of focus for the EU network. These suggestions encompass sharing examples of best practices, supporting the protection of civic space both within the EU and beyond, strengthening anti-corruption civil society organisations, and contributing to the EU anti-corruption strategy to facilitate the monitoring and implementation of forthcoming directives. The presentation concluded with a thought-provoking question: What mechanisms are currently planned, and what can be put in place to effectively combat corruption?

2.3   The German Federal Ministry of Justice

On behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Justice, the representative began by noting that the establishment of the EU network had been a unilateral decision of the Commission, without prior consultation with Member States. Nonetheless, the German Federal Ministry of Justice commended the EU network for its inclusive nature, which aims to facilitate mutual learning and the sharing of knowledge. They addressed several topics that had been previously discussed by the Commission. For instance, they advocated for a more defined and concrete agenda for meetings to ensure focused and productive discussions. The speaker

also suggested the inclusion of hybrid meetings, combining in-person and virtual participation. Furthermore, the speaker emphasised the value of inviting defence counsels and academics to provide unique insights into the implications of the rule of law and fundamental rights. On top of that, the speaker believes the value of creating specific areas for Member States to learn from each other is important, as it could enhance the EU network's effectiveness. The network would be particularly useful for strategy development and risk mapping, as corruption posed a significant threat to the Rule of Law. During their presentation, the speaker underscored several key considerations that warranted the network's attention. Firstly, it is crucial to identify common interests and determine the most effective methodologies for achieving the network's objectives. The German Federal Ministry of Justice expressed their concern about potentially burdening Member States with additional responsibilities. It is also difficult for federal states to report from these meetings to the relevant subsidiary bodies. Secondly, the speaker urged a focus on business compliance programs, emphasising that compliance is most successful when businesses take proactive initiatives, supported by relevant compliance measures and mechanisms. Lastly, the speaker highlighted the need for a more systematic evidence-based approach within the EU. Currently, there is a heavy reliance on narrative-based evidence, which poses significant challenges, especially when it comes to measuring corruption.

2.4 Finnish Ministry of Justice

On behalf of the Finnish Ministry of Justice, the speaker echoed many of the points raised by various speakers. In their view, the primary focus of the EU network should be to revolve around knowledge-sharing, providing support in strategy development, anti-corruption capacity-building, and the exchange of views and best practices. The speaker underscored several ways in which the EU network can benefit its participants. Firstly, it can serve as a platform for sharing experiences. The workshops – organised in past by the Commission – have proven to be highly informative: the speaker suggested additional topics deserving of attention in future workshops, such as strategic approaches to combating corruption and its links to organised crime, as well as how to effectively implement the fifth round of GRECO recommendations. Secondly, the EU network could leverage data analysis and research. The use of focused reports and studies plays a critical role in the fight against corruption, although it is essential to ensure that countries are not burdened beyond their capacity. The EU network's added value is also the opportunity it creates to meet new colleagues to better create links. Lastly, there should be a dialogue with civil society organisations to explore ways to involve them more actively in shaping policies.

2.5 Italian National Anticorruption Authority (ANAC) and the Network of European Authorities for Whistleblowing and Integrity (NEIWA)

The speaker representing the ANAC and the NEIWA has eagerly awaited the proposed package of anti-corruption measures from the European Commission, which was published in May 2023. While numerous anti-corruption networks and discussions already exist across different levels, this can sometimes lead to issues of repetition and overlap. Consequently, the concept of this EU network as a coordinator within the EU was much needed and welcomed. However, before the EU network officially commences its activities, it is essential for all participants to collectively assess the existing institutions, prevention measures, and available possibilities. After this evaluation, the EU network can identify what it truly needs to achieve. It is crucial to emphasise that prevention plays a vital role in combating corruption.

ANAC and NEIWA both believe that the primary prevention issues are the absence of dedicated and independent anti-corruption authorities and a lack of a common definition of corruption and corruption-related issues that encompass areas such as conflict of interest and transparency. For instance, the concept of independence of an institution does not necessarily mean the same thing in all Member States. Moreover, it is essential to address the challenge of having multiple whistleblowing networks in Europe. ANAC and

NEIWA recognise that the presence of numerous networks provided an opportunity for consolidation and synergy. To be effective, the EU network has to adopt a holistic approach, while also acknowledging that not all Member States have the same needs or priorities. Specialisation and a more structured network were suggested as ways to achieve these goals. The EU network, therefore, can play a pivotal role in sharing knowledge and best practices, developing a common definition of corruption, and fostering collaboration among Member States to combat corruption effectively.

2.6   Reflection in the audience

This session sparked discussions and raised questions among the participants. One prominent topic of discussion revolved around the inclusion of the private sector within the EU network. Various participants expressed the view that the private sector should be considered an integral part of the solution and, consequently, should be invited to join the EU network. This viewpoint was initially raised by an NGO representative and found support from several other participants. Additionally, there were questions raised concerning the future EU anti-corruption strategy, particularly regarding its methodology. In response to these points, the Commission provided some insights. They acknowledged the merit of including the private sector and considered it a valuable suggestion. As for the specifics of the anti-corruption strategy, it was noted that it is still in the early stages of development and therefore difficult to provide definitive answers at this time. Furthermore, several comments from the participants received limited discussion. For instance, a participant has observed that corruption is not a primary topic of attention of EU citizens ,as the public is focussing on other issues, such as inflation, health crises, or the war in Ukraine and its consequences. According to this participant, NGOs and civil societies are no longer playing an important role in many countries fighting corruption and struggling to mobilise against corruption. Therefore, he suggested to use a new set of vocabularies to mobilise people against corruption. Another participant echoed this statement and saw a monitoring fatigue as well, as there is sometimes duplication of review mechanisms. An additional participant stressed the importance of education in this field. The new generation needs to know what the approach and vocabulary should be. Lastly, some participants used the opportunity to commend the establishment of the EU network, stating that Member States cannot combat corruption alone.

3   Session 2: What can you do for the EU Network?

This session aimed to identify topics on which the EU network could focus in the future. A panel discussion on possible topics for further exchange and network guidance in the EU network took place, followed by a discussion with all the participants. The session was moderated by a representative of the University of Gothenburg.

3.1   International Olympic Committee (IOC)

Corruption is a criminal activity that affects all area of society: high-profile people, politics, business, and sport is not immune. The responsibility of the IOC as a sports organisation is to act quickly and effectively when such type of misconduct occurs. In 1998, the IOC was confronted with the Salt Lake City scandal involving some of its members. As a response, and to prevent such wrongdoing in the future, the IOC took disciplinary measures by sanctioning the IOC members involved in bribery and also introduced significant reforms. According to the IOC, good governance is of the utmost importance to prevent corruption in sports. Acknowledging the need for enhanced collaboration between sports organisations and governments, the IOC established IPACS. IPACS was set up to be a channel and a platform that brings together different stakeholders. Presently, IPACS is in the process of setting up a network aimed at creating mechanisms that facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge between law enforcement agencies and sports organisations. These mechanisms are designed to effectively manage corruption cases in sports, responding to the collective calls from the global community and sports organisations alike. IPACS collaborate with many stakeholders such as the OECD, the UN and takes part in the G20 working group. The IOC would like to invite the EU to join their efforts in the fight against corruption in sports. They believe there is an opportunity to raise awareness about corruption in sports among EU Member States. The IOC concluded its presentation by expressing its readiness to establish a platform for sharing best practices. Furthermore, they called for support in creating a cooperative mechanism that bridges the realms of criminal justice and sports organisations, as sports organisations cannot address this challenge alone.

3.2   French High Authority for Transparency in Public Life (HATVP)

HATVP undertakes a range of missions aimed at upholding ethical standards and integrity in public service. These missions encompass detecting and curbing illicit enrichment, preventing conflicts of interest via an asset and interest declaration system, controlling the revolving doors between the public and private sectors, raising awareness, offering guidance to public officials, and regulating lobbying activities. In pursuit of these objectives, HATVP has established the last year the European Network for Public Ethics (ENPE), composed of 13 members, with a dual purpose: promoting a culture of public integrity and fostering harmonisation in regulations across EU Member States.

HATVP shared key findings from ENPE's research on corruption prevention. Their findings reveal that there is a great variety of actors in charge of the prevention of corruption in EU Member States. Second, there is a lack of uniformity in reporting obligations among public officials across Member States. For instance, the scope of public officials required to submit a declaration of interest varies in the Member States. Third, the revolving-door regulation varies greatly from one Member State to the other. Many countries have implemented measures to prohibit public officials from joining entities with which they have prior business relationships, contracts, or regulatory/supervisory ties upon leaving office, with cooling-off periods that range from one to three years. Some countries have additional restrictions on post-mandate lobbying. However, this is still not harmonised in all Member States. In concluding their presentation, HATVP expressed their hope that the EU network will leverage ENPE's research and expertise to avoid unnecessary duplication of

efforts in the fight against corruption. They also aspire to elevate ENPE's initiatives on corruption prevention to a higher echelon. This includes harmonising rules related to declarations of interest. Lastly, HATVP seeks to convene all EU Member States to collectively address these vital issues.

3.3 Eurojust and Europol

The representative from Eurojust began their presentation on cross-border corruption by explaining Eurojust's toolkit for combatting corruption. Among these are coordination meetings, the formation of joint investigation teams, alongside collaborations with third countries. Recently, Eurojust published a comprehensive report, drawing upon their extensive experience in handling corruption cases. This report aims to support national authorities grappling with transnational corruption issues. It offers an overview of challenges and potential solutions, such as the use of Eurojust's judicial cooperation tools. Furthermore, the representative highlighted the need for improved utilisation of specific regulations by certain Member States to enhance Eurojust's support in the fight against corruption. For example, Regulation 201/1727 on Eurojust, article 21 on the exchange of information among Member States and their national representatives, should be used more frequently to avoid possible conflicts of jurisdiction and early detection of parallel investigations.

Following the presentation of Eurojust, the representative from Europol took the floor. At Europol, they initiated an analysis project regarding cross-border corruption (AP Corruption), involving collaborative efforts from over 30 countries. Through this analysis project, Europol enhances its capacity to assist EU law enforcement authorities and partner organisations in combatting corruption. Furthermore, Europol generates intelligence products and reports that zoom in on specific cases. In addition to these initiatives, Europol has introduced the anti-corruption SIENA Network. SIENA, a secure information exchange network application, serves as a protected communication channel. It allows for the secure transmission of sensitive security information and intelligence. For instance, in the event of a corruption case in Spain, should they need information from France, this channel can be utilised without the risk of data leaks or breaches.

3.4 Reflection in the audience

The responses to these presentations were overwhelmingly positive. Several participants took the time to commend the concept of the EU network again, emphasising the importance of avoiding overlap with other networks. Some participants then expressed that corruption in sports should indeed be a recurring topic in these meetings. Another topic suggested to be addressed is the connection between corruption and organised crime. Lastly, one of the participants inquired about the utilisation of IPACS tools. The IOC speaker responded that these tools can be leveraged to enhance efforts in EU Member States. These tools have been adapted from the private sector and should also be integrated into educational programs.

4 Session 4: 2023 Rule of Law Report – trends and recommendations

The European Commission (DG HOME) provided a summary of good practices, trends and recommendations related to anti-corruption identified in the 2023 Rule of Law report. In addition, concrete good practices from three Member States (the Netherlands, Estonia, and Romania) were presented. Good practices on anti-corruption in seaports, anti-corruption education and awareness raising and the use of technology for the prevention and repression of corruption were shared. The session was moderated by the European Commission, DG HOME.

4.1 European Commission, DG HOME

A representative from the European Commission, DG HOME, explained the trends and findings of the Rule of Law report. The 2023 Rule of Law report offers an in-depth assessment of the rule of law in all Member States. It scrutinises developments, both positive and negative, across four key areas: the justice system, the anti-corruption framework, media pluralism and freedom, and other institutional issues related to checks and balances. The report also includes 27 country chapters that delve into the development over the past year, follow up on the recommendations of the previous report, and explore how these challenges have been addressed. The 2022 report also included specific recommendations for all Member States for the first time. These recommendations either build upon last year's suggestions in cases where full implementation was not achieved or address emerging challenges. They are designed to provide additional support to Member States as they advance ongoing reforms and to assist them in pinpointing areas where improvements are required. The representative was pleased to inform the participants of the EU network that two-thirds of Member States have followed up on the 2022 Rule of Law report recommendations. Member States also continue to take measures to bolster corruption prevention. However, there is room for greater dissemination of knowledge about the report. Therefore, one of the objectives for the next Rule of Law report is to enhance dissemination efforts, for instance, by organising national workshops.

4.2 Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security

The Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security presented the Dutch approach to combatting corruption in seaports. Corruption in Dutch seaports often is closely linked to organised crime and in particular to drug trafficking. Therefore, in the Netherlands, there is a two-pronged approach to combating corruption. Some measures are specifically targeted at corruption, while others could have an indirect effect on corruption. For the former, measures include enhancing awareness through training and courses. Employee screening in ports is becoming more common. The ministry also collaborates with shipping companies. Lastly, scientific research is conducted to identify corruption risks so that Dutch law enforcement agencies can respond to this. As for the latter, measures include the use of fences, drones, smart CCTV systems, and biometric access control. Dutch law enforcement agencies also experience some challenges in combatting corruption. It is impossible to exchange data in public-private partnerships, which means both parties do not have all the required information. Another downside is that the introduction of more barriers can potentially lead to increased corruption and threats to employees and their families. The presentation ended with the following question: Could you adopt a method in which you do not focus on the resilience of individual employees, but make corruption almost impossible at the system level?

4.3 Estonian Ministry of Justice

The Estonian Ministry of Justice recently launched an e-course for business students. This initiative aims to promote awareness, enhance transparency, and develop investigative skills. This course provides an accessible way to acquire the most relevant knowledge about corruption, economic crimes, and ethics. The course is divided into three themes: 1) theoretical background and practical examples, 2) cases that can be used in lecture discussions or for independent reflections, and 3) tests to confirm your understanding of the newly acquired information. However, this course faces certain challenges. E-learning materials quickly become outdated and need to be constantly updated in order to be useful Achieving this requires resources, both in financial terms and in terms of staffing. In conclusion, the Estonian Ministry of Justice would like to reach the widest possible audience, since e-learning is very important, especially in today's context in light of the rapid rise of digital technologies.

4.4 Expert Forum, NGO from Romania

According to the Expert Forum, there are three ways to assess corruption: 1) the extent to which corruption can be evaluated through objective assessments, 2) the extent to which it is perceived by experts, the public, and the media, and 3) how effectively the government addresses it. Expert Forum believes that the first approach is the most effective. This is because real outcomes must be measured with robust data. Additionally, such data are less disputed by the authorities. Expert Forum has currently attempted to map out clientelism in Romania. They have focused on the phenomenon of buying off mayors. The map shown at the event[2] depicted how various governments in Romania employed clientelist tactics and misused public resources to stay in power. The speaker pointed to important considerations when addressing clientelism. For instance, a water mattress effect can occur, where clientelism shifts from one instrument to another. Moreover, clientelism tends to peak during periods of economic growth, as the public budget expands rapidly. Expert Forum indicates that mapping this phenomenon involves policy analysis, and as such, it does not constitute legal evidence in a court case. However, it can serve as a red flag mechanism. Lastly, this project is dependent on funding; therefore, Expert Forum suggests that it could be implemented at the EU level, enabling comparisons between countries. The project has been carried out with non-EU country funds.

4.5 Reflection in the audience

After this session, there were relatively few comments or questions. One participant asked if there would be evaluations regarding the e-learning tools. In response, the representative from the Estonian Ministry of Justice explains that the platform is relatively new, and therefore, no evaluations have been conducted yet. It is still too early to conclude the program's impact, although feedback has already been requested.

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[2] https://expertforum.ro/primari-clientelari/

5 2023 Rule of Law Report – good practices break out groups

In this session, participants were divided into breakout groups for an interactive exchange on the three good practices. In total, there were six groups divided into three cases. The first three groups immediately started with the case, while the other three had a coffee break first. Then, the situation was reversed. The cases were: 1) use of technology and repression of corruption, 2) combating corruption in seaports, and 3) anti-corruption education and awareness raising. At the beginning of the break out group, the case was discussed with the group before starting the exercise.

The first case about the use of technology and the repression of corruption was discussed using an example, Project Skynet. Project Skynet was initiated in EU Member State X to combat entrenched government corruption. Project Skynet focused on six pillars to combat corruption. Despite initial success, Project Skynet faced challenges, including privacy concerns, data security issues, high costs, and an unintended bias from AI and data analytics. As a result, support waned, and the coalition lost parliamentary backing, leading to early elections. After the entire case, participants were asked what they would do if they were in a position to introduce and implement their version of this project and what it would look like.

During the plenary session, participants from both groups shared their ideas, emphasising the importance of ensuring complete oversight of the process from start to finish. This approach would guarantee the security and transparency of data throughout the entire process. Both groups also examined the systems employed by various Member States, assessing their successes and challenges in implementing such projects. The first group discussed the challenges faced by small organisations in running these systems and the difficulties in maintaining them. Their discussion also touched upon the feasibility of proposed solutions and the necessity of addressing corruption at various levels, including local municipalities and sensitive areas where politicians may manipulate media and financial systems. The second group addressed similar topics and additionally emphasised the importance of capacity building and training in data protection. A significant point of discussion was funding, with the second group highlighting the need for sustainable funding and reinvesting savings. Finally, participants from both groups emphasised the demand for user-friendly, visual tools and the utilisation of live data for future applications.

The second case was about combatting corruption in seaports. In this breakout session, participants discussed good practices in EU Member States on how to address corruption vulnerabilities in EU seaports or other major transportation hubs. This was done through the "think thieving" methodology whereby participants sought to identify interventions based on the activities of a fictional organised crime group. During this breakout session, a fictional seized map was shown, revealing vulnerabilities within the seaports' supply chain exploited by the organised crime group Los Jabalis. The map guides Los Jabalis' illicit activities, making it a valuable asset for combatting corruption. The task for the participants in the break-out session was to identify interventions that reduce vulnerabilities in the supply chain.

In the plenary session, the first group recommended a multidisciplinary approach involving coordination and collaboration with various stakeholders, including those from the private sector, such as major shipping companies. Ideas like a shared database for information exchange were suggested. Additionally, it was discussed that port workers often operate in a closed community, making it challenging to address certain issues, such as whistleblowing. On the other hand, the community feeling has also been observed as an opportunity to address corruption by using this sense of community in favour of the fight against corruption. Consideration should also be given to potential threats that port workers may face. Furthermore, technology could play a huge role in the future, such as placing certain equipment inside containers for inspections. The

second group added that rotating supervisors and workers could also help reduce the formation of networks. They also suggested the use of risk assessments. It was proposed that port workers themselves conduct these risk assessments to identify where they believe vulnerabilities in the supply chain exist.

The third case focused on the promotion of anti-corruption education and the enhancement of awareness. In this break-out session, participants dived into exemplary initiatives aimed at raising awareness that could have a positive impact on the attitudes and perspectives of both the general public and the younger generation. Additionally, the session explored anti-corruption educational efforts. For this break out group, a distinction was drawn between the two aspects. The first group concentrated on awareness-raising campaigns, whereas the second group was dedicated to educational anti-corruption programmes.

Since the first group focused on awareness-raising campaigns, they first identified target groups, such as youngsters. They also thought about different forms of campaigns such as a national campaign that would address both citizens and politicians, but also campaigns in the form of simulations about ethical dilemmas. The second group concentrated on educational programmes. They believed that education alone may not be sufficient to combat corruption, and that law enforcement agencies should enforce stricter measures. Regarding educational methods, they were fervent supporters of various e-learning tools, as technology remains important in the fight against corruption.

6 Session 4: Anti-corruption EU funding opportunities

This session addressed how anti-corruption efforts could be funded. Three different funding opportunities were presented. This session was moderated by the European Commission, DG HOME.

6.1 European Commission, DG EAC

The Erasmus+ programme was the first EU fund that was presented. The key objectives of this fund revolve around creating a programme that is both inclusive and accessible, while also embracing environmental sustainability and nurturing sustainable practices. Additionally, it places a strong emphasis on promoting the utilisation of digital tools and the cultivation of digital skills, as well as encouraging active engagement within the programme and society at large. There are a total of three different pillars: mobility, cooperation, and Jean Monnet actions. The Erasmus+ programme is very broad, and it encompasses a wide range of projects. Projects related to anti-corruption would fall under key pillar 2: cooperation. The representative also drew attention to the Jean Monnet Actions, which provide amongst others support for teacher training aimed at delivering knowledge about the EU within the classroom. To conclude, the speaker provided insights on how individuals can apply to the Erasmus+ programme.

6.2 European Commission, DG REFORM

The Technical Support Instrument (TSI) is an EU programme that provides tailored technical expertise to EU Member States for developing and implementing reforms. This support is extended upon the request of an EU Member State, and it does not require any financial contribution from the requesting State. It operates as a tri-lateral collaboration, fostering synergy between the Member State, the European Commission, and the service provider. For instance, a noteworthy project in Greece was strengthening the preventive tools in the fight against corruption. Through TSI, the goal is to fortify the capacity of national authorities, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of judicial systems in tackling corruption and fraud. Moreover, TSI extends its support to multi-country requests. These are projects of relevance to more than one Member State that share common technical support priorities. This approach also encourages Member States to engage in productive dialogue, exchange best practices, and establish extensive networks. At the end of the presentation, several ideas for multi-country projects were mentioned, such as reinforcing access to justice by promoting alternative dispute resolution and legal aid. Of course, Member States are encouraged to propose additional ideas they wish to explore further.

6.3 European Commission, DG HOME

The Internal Security Fund (ISF) marks the final focal point of discussion during this engaging network meeting. This fund encompasses three key objectives: It strives to enhance and streamline the exchange of information; it aims to improve and intensify cross-border collaboration; and it dedicates itself to supporting the capabilities of Member States in the pursuit of preventing and combatting crime. ISF entails two strands of programming: Member State programmes and thematic facilities. These two strands of programming underpin the specific objectives of the three funds. Member States' programmes are driven by national needs: choice of objectives, actions, and respective budgetary allocations under the lead of Member States. The thematic facility complements Member States' programmes and provides for budgetary flexibility to

react promptly to emerging needs. Both Member States' programmes and the thematic facility primarily serve the interest of internal policies. The ISF has an expansive scope, including counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and combatting human trafficking. Concerning anti-corruption, the representative also provided examples of projects selected under the most recent corruption-related ISF call: KLEPTOTRACE, POSEIDON, and IMonitor, with 2 million euros allocated. For the upcoming years, there is also a call for new research opportunities set to be unveiled in the second quarter of 2024. This includes specific measures such as risk assessments and other preventive strategies. Furthermore, the call will extend its focus to support endeavours concerning the repression of corruption, including the illicit use of financial and professional services to launder the proceeds of corruption. DG HOME invites participants to apply to the upcoming call.

7   Conclusion

European Commission's DG HOME provided the concluding remarks of the meeting: although some participants observe anti-corruption fatigue in Member States, such fatigue is not perceived in the newly created EU network against corruption. Participants were invited to take the opportunity to receive funding presented from various DGs of the European Commission in the previous panel.

Regarding the Rule of Law reports, the Commission has observed some good results, proving that Member States are following up on the Commission's recommendations. Furthermore, the Commission presented its plans to host national workshops on the Rule of Law report in the following months of its publication. In these workshops, public authorities, civil society, and academia will be brought together to discuss specific anti-corruption-related topics, particularly highlighted in the rule of law report.

Potential topics on which the EU network against corruption can work have been discussed during the meeting. The Commission highlighted that the discussion on the potential topics is not closed yet and that the aim is to continue the discussion on concrete topics, as participants have done in the breakout groups. The Commission is proposing to have an open call for future topics for the future EU network meeting.

The new EU network aims to become an umbrella and not to replace any of the existing networks, on the contrary to increase synergies, communication and remove silos. The Commission will also continue to reduce the administrative burden by continuing meetings with UNODC, GRECO, OECD, and others. At the Conference of the State Parties in December in Atlanta, the Commission will co-organise a side event on international review mechanisms together with the OECD and GRECO. The Commission will report back at the next EU network meeting on the event.

The Commission concluded by emphasising that the new EU network against corruption is a network by all of the members and for all of the members.

About Ecorys

Ecorys is a leading international research and consultancy company, addressing society's key challenges. With world-class research-based consultancy, we help public and private clients make and implement informed decisions leading to positive impact on society. We support our clients with sound analysis and inspiring ideas, practical solutions and delivery of projects for complex market, policy and management issues.

In 1929, businessmen from what is now Erasmus University Rotterdam founded the Netherlands Economic Institute (NEI). Its goal was to bridge the opposing worlds of economic research and business – in 2000, this much respected Institute became Ecorys.

Throughout the years, Ecorys expanded across the globe, with offices in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Our staff originates from many different cultural backgrounds and areas of expertise because we believe in the power that different perspectives bring to our organisation and our clients.

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