



## **EUROPEAN UNION**

### **OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group Meeting Vienna, 10 July 2020**

#### **EU Statement on “Combating corruption”**

1. The European Union thanks the panellists for their engaging presentations. We welcome today's meeting as an opportunity to complement the discussions on combatting corruption which have taken place in the context of this year's Economic and Environmental Forum cycle and earlier this week during the Chairmanship's Conference on good governance and the fight against corruption in the digital era. This meeting adds the Asian Partners' perspective and further highlights our common interests in combatting corruption in a comprehensive manner.
2. Corruption constitutes an insidious threat to security and to the health of democracies and economies. Preventing and fighting corruption is a fundamental precondition for upholding the rule of law, peace and security, for achieving sustainable development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Preventing and fighting corruption requires political will, sound anti-corruption legislation, strong institutions free from undue influence and with adequate capacity to enforce laws and policies. The EU reaffirms its strong commitment to continue efforts to promote effective measures against corruption and implement international standards.
3. The fight against corruption has a central place in European internal and external policies. Preventive actions, criminalisation, freezing, confiscation and recovery of assets as well as international cooperation are key elements of our comprehensive approach on tackling corruption. The European Union and its Member States have taken and continue to take determined action in all these areas.

4. Internally, over thirty years, the EU has developed a solid regulatory framework for preventing and combatting corruption and it is constantly striving to ensure the highest possible common standards on anti-corruption. Notable progress has been made with the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office, which is competent to investigate, prosecute and bring to judgment crimes against the financial interests of the EU such as fraud, and related corruption and money laundering. Last October, we also adopted new EU standards for the protection of whistle-blowers, which will significantly contribute to the fight against corruption. The 2018 reform of the EU rules against money laundering and the adoption in June 2019 of new legislation facilitating the access and exchange of financial and other information and to improve cooperation between law enforcement authorities and Financial Intelligence Units, delivered fundamental enhancements to the EU framework on combating corruption and serious and organised crime. In addition, by mid-2021 the Asset Recovery Offices and other competent authorities will have direct access to the national centralised bank accounts registries and data retrieval systems. Our experience shows that new policies, for instance the enhancement of anti-corruption legislation or creation of anti-corruption agencies, have had positive impacts in terms of increasing awareness and led to more targeted actions.
5. Corruption affects all OSCE participating States and we are convinced that efforts to prevent and combat this global phenomenon should be stepped up. The European Union supports efforts to prevent and combat corruption through its international cooperation. The assistance provided by the EU includes support in the following areas: establishing a robust legal framework in line with international standards on preventing and fighting corruption; public administration reform and sound public financial management; justice and security sector reforms; establishing and strengthening specialized anti-corruption bodies; civil society, the media, whistle-blowers, human-rights defenders and Parliaments in exercising their oversight role; and the improvement of the business and investment climate. Rule of law and anti-corruption also figure prominently in our engagement in Western Balkans and in the framework of the Eastern Partnership.
6. The EU has also established cooperation with its Asian Partners in preventing and combating corruption. In the framework of existing Partnership Agreements with Japan, the Republic of Korea and Australia, the EU and its Asian Partners have agreed to cooperate in preventing and combating corruption and transnational organised crime, including

through promoting relevant international agreements. In addition, the fight against corruption is a priority in the EU political and policy dialogue with Afghanistan. The Council Conclusions on Afghanistan of 28 May 2020 recalled the importance of good governance and a solid framework for combating and preventing corruption in the context of the EU cooperation with Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the EU supports a broad range of government reforms through its State Building and Resilience Contract, aimed at improving transparency and accountability. These include public service reforms, public financial management and budgetary transparency and oversight, public procurement and reform of the extractives sector. The EU also supports specific programmes in the security and justice sectors, including a dedicated capacity-building component with the Attorney General's Office. It also works with civil society organisations in their monitoring and whistleblowing role. The fight against corruption will be a key element in this year's discussions on the reform of the Mutual Accountability Framework.

7. In conclusion, we would like to thank Japan and the Slovak Chair for organising today's discussion, which provided an excellent opportunity to share experiences with our Asian Partners. We also reaffirm our support for the priority placed on this topic by the Albanian Chairmanship and for the valuable work conducted by the OSCE in preventing and combating corruption.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA, as well as UKRAINE, ARMENIA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.