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European scholars call the European Commission to continue the Anti-Corruption Report

— In January, the EU Commission decided to bury the Anti-Corruption Report - the core of European anti-corruption initiatives - in silence. We, the signatories of this letter, are convinced that this change in direction is mistaken and comes at the wrong time. Corruption continues to make the headlines in most of the EU Member States.

— The first EU Anti-Corruption Report was published in 2014 and was meant to provide the European Commission with an informative tool to monitor the progress of the fight against corruption in the individual Member States. The report, which had been initiated at the behest of the European Parliament, was supposed to be published every two years. It provided important information on corruption cases, a description of EU-wide corruption trends and an outline of developments in all Member States. Sectoral and cross-cutting corruption risks were identified and concrete recommendations were issued based on country expert assessments.

The 2014 Report highlighted positive and negative aspects of anti-corruption efforts by Member States and their fit with EU anti-corruption legislation and policy (for instance, in the field of public procurement, financial fraud and money laundering). By using the Anti-Corruption Report as a point of reference in the fight against corruption across Europe, the EC could enhance the work carried out by Member States' authorities and seek to leverage the outcome of their work through persuasion.

Unfortunately, the 2014 EU Anti-Corruption Report seems to have been the first and the last. Below the radar of the international media, the Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans has announced via a letter on 25 January the suspension of the EU Anti-Corruption Report – despite the research for the second report having been largely completed. Sadly, this decision does not come as a surprise. Of all the EU's review mechanisms, the Anti-Corruption Report was the most comprehensive and controversial, and its potential impact was certainly feared by some Member States. Although other review mechanisms will continue to assess on a regular basis national anti-corruption

efforts, such as the GRECO evaluations established by the Council of Europe, their scope and impact is much more limited.

The European Commission's decision to discontinue this mechanism is a major blow to the fulfilment of Articles 67 (3) and 83 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), whereby the Union is expected to take measures to prevent and combat crime, including by setting minimum penal standards and the objectives on fighting economic crime and corruption set forth by the Stockholm Programme.

— Major corruption scandals in recent years have not been restricted to individual states. Corruption is a complex cross-border phenomenon, often linked to a series of other serious crimes, such as trafficking in drugs and human beings. Anti-corruption thus requires close cooperation between Member States and EU law enforcement and auditing authorities, as well as proper intelligence information. The EU Anti-Corruption Report was far from being a perfect tool and had several limitations; it was, nevertheless, a first attempt to take the issue of corruption seriously from a policy perspective and to outline common standards to all Member States and not just to candidate countries.

— With the demise of the Anti-Corruption Report, EU policy in this domain is now unclear. We therefore urge the European Commission and the European Parliament to embrace its original Anti-Corruption Agenda and reinstate this monitoring tool.

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