

Combating corruption

2023/0135(COD) - 21/02/2024 - Committee report tabled for plenary, 1st reading/single reading

The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adopted the report by Ramona STRUGARIU (Renew, RO) on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating corruption, replacing Council Framework Decision 2003/568/JHA and the Convention on the fight against corruption involving officials of the European Communities or officials of Member States of the European Union and amending Directive (EU) 2017/1371 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

The proposed Directive establishes minimum rules concerning the definition of criminal offences and sanctions in the area of corruption, as well as measures to prevent and fight corruption at the national and Union level.

The committee responsible recommended that the European Parliament's position adopted at first reading under the ordinary legislative procedure should amend the proposal as follows:

Prevention of corruption

Member States should take measures to ensure that key preventive tools are in place, such as:

- an anticorruption strategy and action plan drafted with the participation of competent authorities;
- an open access to information of public interest;
- effective rules: (i) for the periodic and risk-based disclosure and verification of assets and interests of public officials and establishing sanctions for failure to report substantial assets or interests; (ii) on the interaction between the private and the public sector, including regulation of interest representation and revolving doors situations;
- effective measures to ban citizenship by investment and residency by investment schemes.

Member States should, *inter alia*:

- take measures to ensure transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public officials and political parties, through annual reporting mechanisms;
- adopt comprehensive and periodically reviewed measures targeting common high-risk areas and include actions to identify and fight against organised crime or other serious crime;
- take steps to create a strong public service culture, based on integrity, transparency and accountability;
- carry out an annual assessment to identify the sectors most at risk from corruption;
- develop anti-corruption plans with implementation and monitoring mechanisms to address the main risks in sectors most exposed to the risk of corruption;
- set up appropriate public procurement systems based on transparency, competition and objective criteria for decision-making;

- actively and regularly mobilise and consult civil society, non-governmental organisations, local associations and academia in the development, monitoring and analysis of anti-corruption laws and policies;
- take measures to prevent corruption involving the private sector through the development of codes of conduct.

Specialised bodies for the prevention of corruption

These bodies should be independent of government and able to take autonomous decisions on individual cases, carry out their functions without undue interference and deal with complaints about breaches of the rules on the prevention of corruption.

Criminal offences

Members believe that the following behaviours, when committed intentionally, should be punishable as criminal offences: (i) **illicit political financing**; (ii) **concealment of corruptly acquired assets**; and (iii) **misconduct in public office**.

Sanctions

The proposal introduces new rules on penalties and procedural safeguards to eliminate any possibility of avoiding prosecution for corruption. The report increases some of the minimum prison sentences to bring them into line with the seriousness of the behaviour in question. Penalties could be up to 7 years' imprisonment.

Penalties for natural persons could include dismissal, suspension and reassignment of a public office, disqualification from holding a public office or performing a public service function and exclusion from access to public funding.

Sanctions applicable to legal persons should include (i) criminal or non-criminal fines, proportionate and appropriate to the gravity of the offence. The maximum amount of such fines should not be less than 10% of the total worldwide turnover of the legal person; (ii) publication, at national or Union level, of all or part of the judicial decision relating to the criminal offence committed and of the sanctions or measures imposed.

Aggravating circumstances would include the fact that the offender (i) took advantage of the vulnerable situation of a person involved in the commission of the offence; (ii) resorted to ingenious deception or the instrumentalisation of public officials in order to commit the offence.

Rights for the public concerned to participate in proceedings

Member States should protect and enable victims to have their views and concerns presented and considered at appropriate stages during criminal proceedings against offenders, in a manner that is not prejudicial to the rights of the defence. Moreover, they should take such measures as necessary to ensure that entities or persons who have suffered damage as a result of an act of corruption have the right to **initiate legal proceedings** against those responsible for that damage in order to obtain proportionate and adequate compensation.

In addition, necessary measures should be taken to ensure that the **public concerned** has appropriate rights to participate in the proceedings covered by this Directive, for instance as a civil party, where as a result of a corruption offence such public has a sufficient interest, and is entitled to maintain the impairment of a right, in accordance with national law.