Policy against corruption: instruments and recommendations

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PURPOSE : to put froward a comprehensive plan for the fight against corruption. CONTENT : this paper sets out the principles of fighting corruption at EU level. The Commission regards combating corruption as a political priority. The Communication sets out an overview of what has been achieved at EU level, and indicates what needs to be improved to give fresh impetus to the fight against corruption. It also seeks to identify possible areas where the EU might be an appropriate actor to take future initiatives in the fight against corruption. It is the Commission's firm intention to reduce corruption at all levels in a coherent way within the EU institutions, in EU Member States and outside the EU, i.e. political corruption, corrupt activities committed by and collusively with organised crime groups, private-to-private and so-called petty corruption. The objectives and purposes of combating corruption at EU level need to be put clearly and coherently in the context of other policy objectives resulting from the EC Treaty. These include sound decision making, fair competition, effective functioning of the internal market, protection of the financial interests of the EC, external aid and assistance, open, free and fair international trade. There must be a comprehensive framework to ensuring complementarity between the different areas. The Commission points out that duplicating similar activities can bind unnecessary resources and be counterproductive. It holds the view that, at this stage of policy development, mainly those measures should be strengthened at EU level, which are not already substantively covered, or not with the same degree of mandatory character as EU instruments, by international organisations. This goes in particular for initiatives of the United Nations, the OECD and the Council of Europe, where the EU has been playing a leading role and should continue to do so. The paper sets out the core elements of the future EU policy on corruption: - a strong political commitment against all forms of corruption should come from the highest level of EU institutions; - the implementation of existing anti-corruption instruments should be closely monitored and strengthened for the time being through the adhesion of the European Community to one or both Conventions on Corruption of the Council of Europe and the participation in its monitoring mechanism GRECO; - EU Member States should develop and improve investigative tools and allocate more specialised staff to the fight against corruption; - Member States and EU institutions and bodies should enhance efforts to combat corruption damaging the financial interests of the European Community; - common integrity standards in public administrations across the EU such as the Common Assessment Framework of EU Heads of Civil Service and Public Administration should be further developed at EU level; - Member States and the Commission should support the private sector in its efforts to raise integrity and corporate responsibility; - the fight against political corruption and illicit financing of social partner entities and other interest groups needs to bestrengthened at EU and Member States level; - in their permanent dialogue with acceding, candidate and other third countries, the Member States and the Commission should systematically include corruption-related issues and further assist these countries in their efforts to set-up and implement national anti-corruption policies on the basis of ten general principles, which are set out in this paper; - the EU should continue making the fight against corruption an integral part of its external and trade police.