

Fighting corruption in Ukraine: time to deliver

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The urgent need to fight rampant corruption was one of the catalysts for Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity, the Euromaidan four years ago. Since then, several key reforms have been launched on the anti-corruption front. However, their effective implementation still lags behind and concrete results remain to be seen.

GRECO has been observing with concern the latest developments in Ukraine: the apparent failure of National Agency for Corruption Prevention (NACP) to work effectively, especially in checking asset declarations; the continuing efforts to undermine National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU), including through the recent legal amendments limiting its powers in the criminal procedure and its jurisdiction; and the lack of efficient adjudication for corruption offences following the NABU investigations.

The independence and effectiveness of the newly established anti-corruption bodies must be secured, not undermined. Otherwise, the authorities face a serious risk of further public disenchantment in the anti-corruption reforms, in general, and in the fight against grand corruption, in particular.

What has been done by Ukraine to fight corruption, what shortcomings exist and what further steps must be taken has been the subject of assessment by the Council of Europe's anti-corruption body, GRECO (Group of States against Corruption) over recent years. In the [report](#) published in August 2017 GRECO gave specific recommendations on how to better prevent corruption among parliamentarians, judges and prosecutors. In July it made public its assessment of the implementation by Ukraine of its previous recommendations [on transparency of political funding and criminalisation of corruption](#). These recommendations need to be fully implemented.

The perceived inefficiency and lack of independence of the National Agency for Corruption Prevention was a repeated criticism that GRECO experts heard during the evaluation process in Ukraine. In recent days, new revelations allege its malfunctioning. GRECO has stressed on several occasions, and wants to underline again the vital need to ensure the NACP's independence and impartiality. This is particularly important for the effective monitoring of asset declarations and political financing.

As for the National Anti-Corruption Bureau, during the last evaluation visit in December 2016, GRECO noted alarming attempts to curtail its remit and obstruct its operations. Not only has the trend not been reversed since then, but it appears to have worsened. NABU's strong track record of investigations evidences its efficiency. Any move to undermine NABU puts into question the actual political will to tackle corruption. NABU should be shielded from improper influence or pressure on it to continue its work as resolutely and productively as it has done to date.

More should be done at the level of the judiciary. Currently, the courts trying high-level corruption cases are not well equipped for the task, judges lack specialised knowledge and feel exposed in a complex and unstable political and professional environment. There is a clear need to entrust high-profile corruption cases, involving complex financial schemes, to specialised, independent and impartial judges. This may be accompanied by the establishment, at least for a transitional period, of a specialised anti-corruption court, which would set the wheels in motion to handle such cases effectively and ensure fair adjudication of cases. It is imperative that this be carried through without further delay.

Today, four years after Maidan, we and, more importantly, the Ukrainian citizens need to see a determined "change of gear" in Ukraine. The country has a unique opportunity to progress, and it cannot afford to lose momentum. To justify the expectations of its people and regain their trust, public accountability and transparency must be increased - not only in law, but in practice. The active civil society involvement can further contribute to a lasting change. It is not enough to announce reforms; they must be properly implemented. This would demonstrate true political will to fight corruption. The Council of Europe in general and GRECO in particular are closely monitoring the situation and stand ready to continue supporting Ukraine on this path.