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Corruption remains a challenge for the EU-27

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European Finance Ministers have just strengthened the investigating powers of Eurostat (on Tuesday 8th June) which will from now on be able to check the reliability of national statistics, but what is the level of corruption in Europe ?

P. Verluise analyses the latest figures on corruption perception from Transparency International and reviews the current situation of corruption in the European Union.

A new form of convergence ?

NINE of the thirteen most corrupted countries in the European Union are new member states. However, ten of the twelve EU countries where corruption has reduced between 2004 and 2009 are also new member states. Conversely, the situation has worsened in twelve old member states. Is this a new form of convergence ?
In 2004 and 2007, the enlargements of the European Union meant integrating countries that, in general, had a deep culture of corruption. Corruption is the abuse of public office for personal gain. These practices undermine competition and cause significant loss of resources for development.

A comparison of corruption in Europe.

Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2009 measures the perception of the level of public sector and political corruption. It is a composite index based on 13 different surveys and enquiries carried out by independent bodies. The CPI 2009 covers 180 countries and classifies the countries on a scale of 0 (high level of perceived corruption) to 10 (low level of perceived corruption).

Five years after the biggest enlargement in the European Union's history, it is a fair time to assess the situation. For this, we have the Corruption Perception Index set out by Transparency International (TI). The CPI classifies countries in terms of the degree of perceived corruption in the public sector and in politics. The CPI should be interpreted as an evaluation of countries from 0 (high level of perceived corruption) to 10 (low level of perceived corruption). In a way, that is comparable to a mark out of 10. The global average is 5.

At national level, the CPI of EU-27 member states still differs significantly

Within the average CPI weighted by the population of the EU-27 states (6.4 out of 10), it is possible to divide member states into two groups.

First there are the 13 most corrupt countries in the EU : Greece, Bulgaria and Romania (3.8 out of 10) ; Italy (4.3) ; Latvia and Slovakia (4.5) ; Lithuania and the Czech Republic (4.9) ; Poland (5, the same as the global average) ; Hungary (5.1) ; Malta (5.2) ; Portugal (5.8) ; Spain (6.1).
Note that this group of 13 countries that have a rather poor score with respect to corruption has 9 new member states (NMS). In other words, the influence of their situation prior to membership of the Union remains significant.

Also note that Greece, which entered the European Community 29 years ago on January 1st 1981 and entered the Eurozone 9 years ago in 2001, shows a level of corruption as high as Bulgaria and Romania who entered the EU in 2007.

The following are the 14 EU-27 member states who are the least corrupt : Estonia, Slovenia and Cyprus (6.6 out of 10) ; France (6.9) ; Belgium (7.1) ; United Kingdom (7.7) ; Austria (7.9) ; Germany and Ireland (8) ; Luxembourg (8.2) ; Finland and the Netherlands (8.9) ; Sweden (9.2) and Denmark (9.3).

This group of least corrupt EU countries includes 3 of the 12 new member states of which 2 are former communist states. Estonia and Slovenia prove that there is no inevitable link between post-communism and corruption.

Further analysis of the dynamics is required.

Dynamics

During the five years of the first Barroso Commission, how did corruption evolve in the candidate countries (Romania and Bulgaria, between 2004 and 2007) and members of what then became the EU-27 ?

Between 2004 and 2009, only the Corruption Perception Index of Sweden (9.2 out of 10) did not change. The other 26 countries of the EU-27 have seen their evaluations change, sometimes significantly. It is possible to distinguish between two distinct groups : countries that are regressing and countries that are progressing.

The 14 EU-27 countries that regressed between 2004 and 2009 with respect to corruption perception are (from the biggest fall to the smallest) : Malta (-1.6 out of 10) ; Spain (-1) ; United Kingdom (-0.9) ; Finland (-0.8) ; Austria, Portugal, Italy and Greece (-0.5) ; Belgium (-0.4) ; Bulgaria (-0.3) ; Luxembourg, Denmark, Germany and France (-0.2).

Note that there are only two new member states among the country that have regressed – Malta joined in 2004 and Bulgaria joined in 2007.

The 12 EU-27 countries that progressed between 2004 and 2009 with respect to corruption perception are (from the biggest increase to the smallest) : Poland (+1.5 out of 10) ; Cyprus (+1.2) ; Romania (+0.9) ; Czech Republic (+0.7) ; Slovenia and Estonia (+0.6) ; Slovakia, Latvia and Ireland (+0.5) ; Lithuania and Hungary (+0.3) ; The Netherlands (+0.2).

Note that this group of 12 countries that have progressed with respect to corruption perception includes 10 new member states. It is true that they had great scope for improvement. That said, this information should be considered along with the statistics.

Let us consider these changes in the context of the community.

Contradictory changes within the context of the EU-27

Changes vary according to the sub-group considered.

From 2004 to 2009, the average weighted CPI by the relative weight of population of former EU-15 countries fell from 7.35 to 6.89 out of 10. This translates to a reduction in perceived corruption of 0.46 points. Within the EU-27 area, there is a less significant fall from 6.60 to 6.43 out of 10. This translates to a reduction in the index of 0.17 points.

Lastly, the only sub-group which the average weighted CPI by the relative weight of population progressed between 2004 and 2009 is that of the 12 new member states – from 3.80 to 4.69 out of 10. That is an improvement of 0.89 points. Of course, the sub-group of 12 new member states still has a corruption index that is higher than the global average (5 out of 10). However, it is due to this sub-group that the average weighted CPI of the entire EU-27 did not regress further.

The old member states that are most responsible for this are those that, in 2009, have a CPI lower than the EU-27's weighted average : Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. As it happens, the financial situation of these countries is often a cause for concern.

Everything must be done so that EU member states, whether new or old, can strengthen their defences against corruption – if only to promote their economic development.

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