Parliament greenlights EU anti-corruption rules

Press Releases PLENARY SESSION LIBE 1 hour ago

First EU-wide criminal law framework to combat corruption

Harmonised definitions and penalty levels for bribery, misappropriation and illicit enrichment, among others

National anti-corruption strategies and data sharing at EU level

Reinforced cooperation with EU agencies and bodies

On Thursday, Parliament adopted new EU-wide rules establishing a harmonised criminal law framework to prevent and combat corruption across the Union.

The directive, provisionally agreed between Parliament and Council in December 2025, sets out common definitions of corruption offences, including bribery, misappropriation, obstruction of justice, trading in influence, unlawful exercise of functions, illicit enrichment linked to corruption, concealment, and private-sector corruption, and harmonises rules on sanctions. The directive was adopted with 581 votes in favour, 21 against and 42 abstentions.

A common approach to deterrence and penalties

By modernising existing rules, aligning legal definitions, and introducing structured sanction levels, the new framework aims to address enforcement gaps, in particular in cross-border cases. The sanctions system revolves around EU-wide statutory maximum penalties, i.e. ensuring that maximum penalties under national rules cannot be too low. Member states will retain the possibility to adopt stricter rules and tailor provisions to their national legal systems.

Cooperation to tackle existing and emerging challenges

Cooperation between national authorities and EU bodies — including the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), the European Public Prosecutor's Office, Europol, and Eurojust — is reinforced, alongside improved information exchange and coordination. Member states will also publish comparable, machine-readable data annually, to enhance transparency and evidence-based policymaking.

National strategies and requirements for independent bodies

To strengthen prevention and governance, member states will be required to adopt and regularly update national anti-corruption strategies (involving civil society in the process). They will also have to conduct risk assessments and ensure robust systems on conflicts of interest, political financing transparency, and integrity standards. Dedicated and sufficiently independent bodies to prevent and address corruption must also be in place.

Quote

Parliament's lead MEP, Raquel García Hermida-van der Walle (Renew, NL) commented:

“This law is historic. Corruption has caused journalists to be silenced, citizens to be killed, and lives cut short. Behind every statistic is a name, a story, and a future denied. Corruption also drains billions from our economies, erodes trust in government, and undermines democracy itself. Left unchecked, it threatens the very foundation of our Union. This law is about defending Europe at its core and delivering for our citizens.”

Next steps

The directive must now be formally adopted by the Council before entering into force 20 days after its publication in the Official Journal of the EU. Member states will then have 24 months to transpose it, except for the provisions on risk assessments and national strategies, which have a 36-month deadline.

Background

On 3 May 2023, the Commission presented an anti-corruption package. Based on Article 83 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the text defined corruption as an area of “particularly serious crime with a cross-border dimension” and included measures to both prevent and counter corruption. According to a 2025 Eurobarometer survey, 69% of Europeans believe that corruption is widespread in their country, while 66% think that high-level corruption cases are not pursued sufficiently.

Contacts:

Kyriakos KLOSIDIS

Press Officer (EL)

+32 228 32357 (BXL)

+32 470 96 47 35

kyriakos.klosidis@europarl.europa.eu

libe-press@europarl.europa.eu

@EP_Justice

@libe.europarl.europa.eu

Janne OJAMO

Press Officer (FI)

+32 228 41250 (BXL)

+32 470 89 21 92

janne.ojamo@europarl.europa.eu

libe-press@europarl.europa.eu

@EP_Justice

@libe.europarl.europa.eu

Further information

- Texts adopted in plenary (26/3/2026)
- Recording of the debate in plenary (25/3/2026)
- Procedure file
- Legislative train
- EP Research Service briefing - Directive on combating corruption (September 2024)

EP Research Service briefing - Combating corruption in the European Union (December 2024)

Free photos, video and audio material

Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

Ref.: 20260323IPR38831