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2021 CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX REVEALS A DECADE OF STAGNATING CORRUPTION LEVELS IN WESTERN EUROPE AMIDST ONGOING SCANDALS

While Western Europe and the European Union remains the highest scoring region, progress has halted and worrying signs of backsliding have emerged

Berlin, 25 January 2022 – The 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released today by Transparency International shows that corruption levels remain at a standstill worldwide. In Western Europe and the European Union, 84 per cent of countries have declined or made little to no progress in the last 10 years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given European countries an excuse for complacency in anti-corruption efforts as accountability and transparency measures are neglected or even rolled back. Weakening good governance and checks and balances heightens the risk of human rights violations and further corruption. Countries like **Poland** (56) and **Hungary** (43) have backslid, with harsh crackdowns on rights and freedom of expression. Others still near the top like **Germany** (80), the **United Kingdom** (78) and **Austria** (74) faced serious corruption scandals.

Flora Cresswell, Western Europe regional coordinator of Transparency International said: "Stagnation spells trouble across Europe. Even the region's best performers are falling prey to major scandals, revealing the danger of inaction. Others have allowed corruption to fester, and are now seeing serious violations of freedoms. Nor does the region exist in a vacuum: lack of national enforcement in Europe means corruption is exported globally as foreign actors utilize weak laws to hide money and fund corruption back home."

WESTERN EUROPE AND EUROPEAN UNION HIGHLIGHTS

The CPI ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption on a scale of zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

The CPI Western Europe and European Union average holds at 66, having increased by only one point since 2012.

- **Denmark** (88) and **Finland** (88) top the region and the world (alongside New Zealand), with **Norway** (85) and **Sweden** (85) rounding out the top.
- **Romania** (45), **Hungary** (43) and **Bulgaria** (42) remain the worst performers in the region.

- **Switzerland** (84), **Netherlands** (82), **Belgium** (73), **Slovenia** (57), **Poland** (56), **Cyprus** (53) and **Hungary** (43) are all at historic lows on the Index this year.

In the last decade, 26 countries in the region have either declined or made little to no significant progress.

- Since 2012, **Luxembourg** (81), **Poland** (56), **Cyprus** (53) and **Hungary** (43) have significantly declined on the CPI.
- Five countries in the region have significantly improved their scores over that period: **Austria** (74), **Estonia** (74), **Latvia** (59), **Italy** (56) and **Greece** (49).

CORRUPTION, HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

Across Europe, governments are using the COVID-19 pandemic to expand executive powers, skip over accountability measures and in some cases curtail fundamental rights.

- The government of **Hungary** has used the COVID-19 pandemic to further consolidate political control and restrict rights. Freedom of expression has been severely limited and the media is under threat, contributing to decreased accountability and a historic low score of 43 this year.
- Even in the high-scoring **UK** (78), judicial independence and respect for the rule of law are now under strain following government plans to curtail court powers. The UK also faced a series of procurement and corruption scandals (which emerged after this year's CPI data collection), including breaches of lobbying rules and unlawful awarding of COVID-19 contracts.
- Despite having improved since 2012, the last three years have shown signs of decline in **Austria** (74). The government has delayed implementing a national anti-corruption strategy under cover of COVID-19. Meanwhile, allegations broke in October 2021 that (now former) Chancellor Sebastian Kurz bribed journalists and pollsters using public funds in his 2017 election campaign.
- This year's Pandora Papers demonstrated how human rights abusers and other corrupt actors utilize weak systems in supposedly clean democracies to move wealth and further fund corruption and human rights abuses abroad. In some of the highest-ranking countries globally – including **Denmark** (88), **Sweden** (85), **Switzerland** (84) and the **Netherlands** (82) – banks operate with impunity as EU member states drag their feet in implementing anti-money laundering legislation.

Transparency International calls on governments to act on their anti-corruption and human rights commitments and for people across the globe to join together in demanding change.

Daniel Eriksson, Chief Executive Officer of Transparency International said:

"In authoritarian contexts where control over government, business and the media rests with a few, social movements remain the last check on power. It is the power held by teachers,

shopkeepers, students and ordinary people from all walks of life that will ultimately deliver accountability.”

About the Corruption Perceptions Index

Since its inception in 1995, the Corruption Perceptions Index has become the leading global indicator of public sector corruption. The Index scores 180 countries and territories around the world based on perceptions of public sector corruption, using data from 13 external sources, including the World Bank, World Economic Forum, private risk and consulting companies, think tanks and others. The scores reflect the views of experts and business people.

The process for calculating the CPI is regularly reviewed to make sure it is as robust and coherent as possible, most recently by the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre in 2017. All the CPI scores since 2012 are comparable from one year to the next. For more information, see article: [The ABCs of the CPI: How the Corruption Perceptions Index is calculated](#).

Notes to editors

- The Western Europe and European Union regional analysis provides further detail, including on countries to watch Slovenia and Austria.
- The Trouble at the Top feature highlights corruption challenges in the top 25 ranked countries in this year’s CPI, including the impact of transnational corruption.
- See also the 2021 CPI report, which contains recommendations from Transparency International.

Interview requests

In case of country-specific queries, please contact [Transparency International’s national chapters](#).

In case of queries around regional and global findings, please contact the Transparency International Secretariat: press@transparency.org.