

Anti-Corruption Conference

7-8 July

Dear Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to congratulate the Economic Policy Research Institute for taking the initiative to organise this seminar on the fight against corruption, as well as the University of Economy and Technology which is hosting the seminar over these two days and the Union of Chambers for their support.

The presence of the Minister of Justice underlines the significance of the topic which we will be discussing and will, I am sure, help to ensure that the ideas and experiences that will be shared over the next 2 days will be taken into account at the highest levels of the administration. Last but not least, thank you to all the international experts and representatives of international organisations who are gathered here today.

Corruption corrodes democracy, discourages foreign investment, and is a significant obstacle to development. It is also morally wrong. A corrupt society is an unhealthy society.

This impressive array of experience and knowledge shows us that corruption, unfortunately, is a problem that many countries are facing. Corruption exists in the EU countries, although in a block of 25 countries there obviously are differences between them. And, yes, we have had our problems within the Commission. It is a shared problem and, in an ever more connected world, we are each affected by corruption in other countries and depend on each other to effectively combat it. However, the seminar should also show, I trust, that effective strategies and best practices have been developed around the world and that we can and should profit from these positive experiences.

Having lived in Turkey for 2 years I have observed that corruption is a major concern in public opinion. Several surveys indicate a high level of perceived corruption. The business community points to corruption as an obstacle to both domestic and foreign companies. It was a major issue in the 2002 general election. The media regularly runs stories about high level personalities facing allegations. In this context the government adopted an Action Plan in 2002 and then an Emergency Action Plan in 2003. However, implementation of these action plans remains a considerable challenge and progress so far has been mixed.

But corruption is a difficult phenomenon to define, measure and monitor. Because of its diffuse nature it is a challenge to effectively organise and institutionalise the fight against corruption. It is

therefore quite understandable that there are different approaches which can be used and I hope that this seminar will provide a forum in which these approaches can be compared, in order to see more clearly what arrangements might serve Turkey best. This seminar allows us to address both prevention - by addressing the root causes of corruption - as well repression through institutional and judicial mechanisms.

In the European Union we are particularly interested in cooperating with Turkey as a country which has applied to join us. We stand on the threshold of a new era in relations. The opening of accession negotiations on 3 October, as recommended by the Commission, will open up a whole new field of opportunities and challenges for us both.

The effectiveness of the fight against corruption will be an important factor in Turkey's EU membership drive. Firstly, it will be part of the process of consolidating the reforms under the political criteria. A transparent public administration and effective judiciary both depend on and are necessary for the stamping out of corruption. Thus the level of corruption will be an indicator of the capacity of these institutions which are necessary to guarantee democracy and the rule of law.

Secondly, the EU has developed a growing body of policies and instruments for the fight against corruption at EU level. Indeed, as the

European single market has been put into place, with increased economic freedoms across an area covering 450 million people, so it has become increasingly obvious that we need increased judicial and police cooperation across that area, in order to safeguard its security. This includes the fight against corruption and, as a prospective member, Turkey will need to equip itself with the necessary capacity to participate in this intra-European cooperation. In this context, the Commission has developed a set of 10 principles for improving the fight against corruption in candidate countries. This will be presented in detail by colleagues from the Commission during the seminar, as will our experience in fighting corruption within EU institutions.

In conclusion, in Turkey's EU accession process we will need to tackle many difficult issues and it will be important to approach them in an open and constructive spirit. The fact that today we are able to discuss difficult issues such as corruption is a sign of our mature and close relations and it bodes well for our future cooperation.

Thank you.