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Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights

Fighting corruption – General principles of political responsibility

Introductory memorandum

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1. Introduction

1. On 23 November 2018, the motion for a resolution on “Fighting corruption – General principles of political responsibility” ([Doc. 14639](#)) was referred to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights (the committee) for report. I was appointed rapporteur by the committee on 13 December 2018; following a hiatus in the participation of the Ukrainian delegation, I was reappointed by the committee on 30 January 2020.

2. The motion aims to analyse the extent and effects of corruption, tax evasion and fraudulent misuse of public funds amongst politicians. In addition, the motion targets money-laundering which facilitates corruption and abuse of office for personal gain. It seeks to develop an understanding of political responsibility in such situations. It further leads to questioning the efficiency and adequacy of member States' mechanisms and tools to prevent and fight political corruption, fraud and money-laundering.

2. [Non-exhaustive list of] Examples of situations of concern in Council of Europe member States

3. Corruption in all Council of Europe member States remains widespread. Recent corruption scandals described in the next few paragraphs may just be the tip of the iceberg.

4. The “Panama Papers” involved 11.5 million confidential files from one of the world's biggest offshore service providers, Panama's *Mossack Fonseca* that were obtained from an anonymous source by the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and later shared with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ).¹ Numerous European political figures appeared in the Panama papers. For instance, in **Andorra**, the Panama Papers confirmed the former minister of finance (2011-2019), Jordi Cinca owned offshore interests. He had previously admitted to owning an offshore company in Panama between 1999-2002; he did not resign. In **Azerbaijan**, the family of President Ilham Aliyev (in office since 2003) owned an offshore complex which held interests in gold mining, real estate and a business conglomerate. In **France**, the Panama Papers confirmed that Jérôme Cahuzac, former member of Parliament (1997-2002, 2007-2012) and former French budget minister (2012-2013) owned a Seychelles company in 2009. He had previously waged a campaign against tax evasion and was forced to admit he lied to President François Hollande, former colleagues in Parliament and the French people when he repeatedly denied owning foreign bank accounts. He had in 2013 been expelled from the Socialist Party and resigned from his ministerial post. In 2018, he was sentenced to two years in prison and five years of electoral ineligibility. In **Georgia**, Georgian billionaire and former Prime Minister (2012-2013), Bidzina Ivanishvili owned a company in the British Virgin Islands. “For the reporting period of 2011-2012 Prime Minister Ivanishvili had no interest in the company [...] and therefore there

* Document declassified by the Committee on 17 May 2021.

¹ ICIJ, *Panama Papers: The Power Players*; The Guardian, *What are the Panama Papers? A guide to history's biggest data leak*, April 2016. ICIJ, *Who uses the offshore world*. See also, Assembly [Resolution 2130 \(2016\)](#) “Lessons from the “Panama Papers” to ensure fiscal and social justice”.

was no obligation to report it in his declaration," a spokesman said. B. Ivanishvili resigned voluntarily after his party won the 2013 presidential election but continued to wield power behind the scenes. In **Greece**, Stavros Papastavrou, Deputy Chief of Staff for European and International Affairs for the Prime Minister between 2012 and 2015, was found to be involved in multiple offshore foundations, from which he has now resigned. In **Hungary**, while then National Assembly member Zsolt Horváth became director of an offshore company in 2013 but did not declare his financial interests to the Hungarian parliament in 2014. In **Iceland**, Prime Minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson resigned on 5 April 2016, after it became known that he owned a British Virgin Islands shell company which held nearly \$4 million in bonds in the three major Icelandic banks that collapsed. Additionally, it was reported that Bjarni Benediktsson, former Prime Minister and currently minister for finance and economic affairs, purchased shares in a Seychelles shell company through the Luxembourg branch of an Icelandic bank during Iceland's banking crisis. The leak also revealed that Ólöf Nordal, former Interior Minister of Iceland, now deceased, created an offshore company to hold proceeds of her husband's stock options. In **Italy**, former Prime Minister of Italy and, since 2019, member of the European Parliament, Silvio Berlusconi was listed in the Panama Papers.² In **Malta**, the Panama Papers linked energy minister Konrad Mizzi to a shell company in Panama. K. Mizzi did not resign, refuting the illegality of the structure, and Prime Minister Muscat responded to widespread public outrage by merely transferring him between portfolios. In **Poland**, in 2012, Paweł Piskorski, current chairman of the Democratic Party (since 2009), acquired a Panamanian company to "buy bonds of a Singapore company," which was dissolved in 2015. Previously, mayor of Warsaw from 1999 to 2002, and a member of the European Parliament from 2004 to 2009, he had been forced to leave his party in 2006 when he misrepresented the value of assets he declared as a member of the European Parliament. In **Spain**, the Spanish minister of industry, energy and tourism, José Manuel Soria, resigned in April 2016 after the Panama Papers linked him to offshore investments in the Bahamas, and news reports connected him to a company in the tax haven of Jersey. Despite his prior assurances that he did not own companies in tax havens, the Panama Papers indicated that Rodrigo de Rato y Figaredo, former minister of economy from 2000 to 2004, vice president from 1996 to 2004, and director of the International Monetary Fund from 2004 to 2007, had more than €3.6 million in two offshore companies. He had previously been arrested in 2015 for alleged fraud, embezzlement and money laundering. In 2017, he was found guilty of embezzlement and sentenced to 4½ years' imprisonment. In **Ukraine**, former President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, had pledged to sell his confectionary business (Roshen) if elected, but the Panama Papers indicate that in 2014 he had instead transferred ownership to an offshore holding company in the British Virgin Islands, of which he was the ultimate beneficial owner. Former Prime Minister of Ukraine (1996-1997), Pavlo Lazarenko was shown to have used offshore companies which were subjects of multiple corruption investigations going back to 1998, while he was also a member of parliament. In 1999, the Verkhovna Rada had voted to waive Lazarenko's parliamentary immunity; however, Lazarenko fled the country on the eve of the parliamentary vote. In 2009, he was convicted by a US Court of money-laundering \$30 million he embezzled as prime minister through accounts in Poland, Switzerland, Antigua and the US.³ In the **United Kingdom**, Conservative life peer since 1973 Baroness Pamela Sharples was sole shareholder of a company based in the Bahamas that she used to make investments but had not declared to parliament. The law firm handling Baroness Sharples' affairs said that she became a director of the company in 2000 and that the company was registered in the United Kingdom in the same year and now pays taxes to the British government. She retired from the House of Lords in December 2017 at the age of 94.

5. The "Paradise Papers" were a set of 13.4 million confidential electronic documents relating to offshore investments that were leaked again to the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, shared with the ICIJ and made public in 2017.⁴ It revealed offshore interests and activities of more than 120 politicians and world leaders, including **Lithuanian** member of the European Parliament, Antanas Guoga, (who held a stake in an Isle of Man company which was not revealed in his parliamentary disclosures); current **Russian** member of the State Duma, Alexey Ezhov (who was identified as the director of a Bermuda company) and former member of the State Duma from 2003 to 2016, Aleksandr Skorobogatko (who was the ultimate beneficial owner of a company incorporated in 2010. He resigned from the parliament in 2016); former **Spanish** Mayor of Majadahonda, Guillermo Ortega Alonso (who was also implicated in the Gürtel case; he resigned), former member of the Parliament of Galicia, Pablo Crespo (who was found guilty in the Gürtel case of bribery, money laundering and fraud and sentenced to more than 37 years in prison) and former Mayor of Barcelona and current President of the Convergence and Union parliamentary group in the Barcelona City Council, Xavier Trias (whose name was on a family trust in Switzerland allegedly to conceal money during most of his political career); former vice prime minister of **Ukraine** from 2014 to 2015, Valeriy Voshchevsky (who was listed in Malta's register of

² In 2013, Mr Berlusconi had been convicted of tax-fraud, expelled from the Senate and prohibited from taking part in any general election for 6 years.

³ Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), *Kyiv Post owner caught up in late 90s scandal*, 3 April 2016.

⁴ ICIJ, [Explore the politicians in the Paradise Papers](#).

companies in 2013) and Anton Prigodsky, former member of the Verkhovna Rada from 2006 to 2014 (who owned a company registered in Malta in 2013).

6. The Assembly's report on "Laundromats" – large-scale international money-laundering schemes – illustrates the extent of money laundering involving member States. The "Global Laundromat" enabled the illegal transfer of at least US \$21 billion, and perhaps as much as US\$80 billion, from the Russian Federation to recipients around the world; the "Azerbaijani Laundromat" enabled the transfer of US\$2.9 billion out of Azerbaijan; and the "Troika Laundromat" was used to transfer another US\$4.6 billion out of Russia.⁵ The rapporteur for the "Laundromats" report, our former colleague Mr van de Ven, had explained that the laundered money reached a wide range of beneficiaries, including family members of several high officials. These included Yaqub Eyyubov, Azerbaijan's first deputy prime minister since 2003, the sons of the deputy chief of the Azerbaijani anti-corruption authority, Ali Nagiyev, the daughters of Fizuli Alakbarov, Minister for Labour and Social Protection and Azer Gasimov, President Aliyev's press secretary. (Note that several of these names appeared also in the Panama Papers.)

7. The "Azerbaijani Laundromat" also provided money that contributed to corruptive activities within the Parliamentary Assembly, as was established in the report of the Independent Investigative Body (IBAC).⁶ Five former Assembly members most clearly seem to have received some of this money, all of whom have been sanctioned by the Assembly for breaches of its ethical rules. Luca Volontè's prosecution by the Italian authorities for bribery and money laundering remains pending. The German Parliament has found that Karin Strenz violated its ethical rules and fined her a record €20 000. Transparency International Germany also filed criminal complaints against both Ms Strenz and another former member, Eduard Lintner for the offence of corruption of public officials. Mr Lintner is accused of having received €4 million from Azerbaijan through British shell companies between 2008 and 2016. In January 2020, the public prosecutor's office in Frankfurt am Main launched a criminal investigation into Ms Strenz and Mr Lintner.⁷ Their houses were searched on 30 January 2020, as was that of Alain Destexhe (and that of another former member, Stef Goris). It is, however, not known thus far whether any action has been taken against the last of the five: Zmagaj Jelinčič Plemeniti of Slovenia.

8. Apart from these large-scale media revelations, numerous individual cases have emerged in recent years. In 2019, the European Commission ordered the **Czech Republic** to repay €17 million in EU subsidies received by a company owned by the prime minister, Andrej Babiš.⁸ In October 2019, **Moldova's** National Anti-Corruption Centre and special prosecutor declared that Vladimir Plahotniuc, a former parliamentary deputy and chairman of the ruling Democratic Party of Moldova (DPM), was wanted for money laundering on an exceptionally large scale.⁹ In **Romania**, the leader of the ruling Social Democratic Party, Liviu Dragnea, was in May 2019 ordered to begin serving a 3½ year prison sentence for corruption and abuse of power.¹⁰ In **Spain**, the ongoing "Gürtel case" helped "shatter the nation's two-party system, transform how the public viewed the people running the country and, eventually, [brought] down a government".¹¹ This case involves Francisco Correa, a powerful business magnate, who conspired with local politicians to rig lucrative public contracts. In May 2018, 27 defendants – including two former People's Party mayors, one former parliamentarian – were given more than 300 years jail time in total. The prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, had to step down after a vote of non-confidence.

9. I will explore this situation in more detail in my final report.

⁵ Assembly [Resolution 2279 \(2019\)](#) "Laundromats: responding to new challenges in the international fight against organised crime, corruption and money laundering".

⁶ [Report of the Independent Investigation Body on the allegations of corruption within the Parliamentary Assembly](#), 15 April 2018. See also, Assembly [Resolution 2216 \(2018\)](#) "Follow-up to the report of the Independent Investigation Body on the allegations of corruption within the Parliamentary Assembly" and Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, [webpage](#) on follow-up to the investigation into allegations of corruption in 2017.

⁷ Transparency International, [Transparency Germany welcomes corruption investigation into Karin Strenz and Eduard Lintner](#), 30 January 2020. The Rostock public prosecutor had decided in May 2019 not to launch an investigation.

⁸ Transparency International, [European Commission confirms Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš has conflict of interest](#), 5 June 2019.

⁹ Global Voices, [Can Moldova ever win its gruelling fight against corruption?](#), 3 February 2020. See also, Assembly [Resolution 2308 \(2019\)](#) "The functioning of democratic institutions in the Republic of Moldova".

¹⁰ See also, GRECO, [Fourth evaluation round, Interim compliance report for Romania](#), June 2019; OCCRP, [Romanian PM "Disappointed" with EU Threats over Corruption](#), 16 May 2019; European Commission, [Progress report on Romania under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism](#), 13 November 2018.

¹¹ The Guardian, [Spain's Watergate: inside the corruption scandal that changed a nation](#), March 2019.

3. The impact of political corruption, tax evasion and association with offshore accounts on popular trust in European countries' democratic institutions

10. The Assembly has frequently stated that corruption threatens the rule of law, democracy and human rights, undermines public trust and endangers the stability of public institutions. In recent years, it has adopted resolutions and recommendations on, for instance, "Daphne Caruana Galizia's assassination and the rule of law in Malta and beyond: ensuring that the whole truth emerges" ([Resolution 2293 \(2019\)](#)); "Promoting integrity in governance to tackle political corruption" ([Resolution 2170 \(2017\)](#) and [Recommendation 2105 \(2017\)](#)); "Corruption as a threat to the rule of law" ([Resolution 1943 \(2013\)](#) and [Recommendation 2019 \(2013\)](#)); "Keeping political and criminal responsibility separate" ([Resolution 1950 \(2013\)](#)); "Transparency and openness in European institutions" ([Resolution 2125 \(2016\)](#) and [Recommendation 2094 \(2016\)](#)).

11. The Assembly stressed that "corruption jeopardises the good functioning of public institutions and diverts public action from its purpose, which is to serve the public interest. It disrupts the legislative process, affects the principles of legality and legal certainty, introduces a degree of arbitrariness in the decision-making process and has a devastating effect on human rights."¹² It recognised that "frequent corruption scandals, both in national and European institutions, have led populist leaders to exploit the disenchantment of the people with the 'corrupt elite'.¹³ One must note with concern that corruption has a toll on democracy, and threatens the rule of law and public institutions. Tax evasion and the association of political figures with offshore accounts also cause public disappointment with democratic institutions and these public figures. Even in member States where there are legitimate, legal uses for offshore companies, the mere association of a public figure with an offshore company has an extensive effect on the public perception of the *politicum* as a whole. It is an established practice that most offshore accounts are used for tax evasion or avoidance. Top politicians involved in such practices, display reluctance to ensure the state's economic stability, distrust towards the national banking system and stability of the national currency by not keeping their own money in banks, as well as establish a precedent of tax evasion for other politicians to follow and create uncertainty and instability in the country. Consequently, the radicalisation of politics, derogation from democratic values, misconduct of public figures and advent of the populist parties consisting mainly of opinion leaders with no professional background rather than competent politicians, are a few of the apparent repercussions of public disillusionment towards politics. In the midst of the "Panama Papers" scandal for instance, the Assembly expressed its concern "about the scope of tax avoidance, tax evasion, and even tax fraud in modern societies, which nowadays involves public personalities, who should be role models of ethical behaviour". The Assembly considered that a "higher standard of ethics in politics and in the business world is essential to uphold our economic, social and democratic systems". It called "for measures to ensure transparency in the business activities of politicians, since opaque relationships between business and politics undermine people's trust in democratic structures".¹⁴

12. Additionally, the Assembly has stressed in the past that corruption is usually deeply embedded in a social, cultural and political environment. Altering attitudes and promoting integrity, accountability and transparency at all levels of public life is central to reinforcing societies' resilience to corruption. These are the key values to ensuring democratic institutional reforms and anti-corruption initiatives can succeed. My report will seek to assess developments since the most recent Assembly reports and the extent to which Assembly recommendations have been implemented.

4. Council of Europe standards and monitoring

13. The strategic importance of the fight against corruption to the Council of Europe as a whole was underlined by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, who, in a recent speech to the Assembly, warned against the "rampant corruption, ineffective public administration and efforts to undermine the checks and balances required in any healthy democracy"; an area where member States, including parliaments, have a "responsibility to act".¹⁵

14. The European Court of Human Rights (the Court) has stressed the need for the prosecuting authorities to take effective measures for the suppression and prosecution of corruption given "the importance of thwarting the corrosive effect of corruption on the rule of law in a democratic society". The Court also found that the relevant rules requiring both a politician and his or her spouse to disclose details of their financial situation and property portfolio pursued the legitimate aim of "the prevention of crime", namely corruption, as provided for in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (the Convention). It also considered that these rules

¹² Assembly [Resolution 1943 \(2013\)](#) "Corruption as a threat to the rule of law".

¹³ Assembly [Resolution 2170 \(2017\)](#) "Promoting integrity in governance to tackle political corruption".

¹⁴ Op. cit. [Resolution 2130 \(2016\)](#).

¹⁵ Secretary General of the Council of Europe, [Address to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](#), Strasbourg, 29 January 2020.

were “necessary in a democratic society” within the meaning of Article 8 of the Convention and added that “the issue of the financial situation of persons holding political offices is one of legitimate public interest and concern”.¹⁶

15. Three treaties developed by the Council of Europe deal with corruption from the point of view of criminal, civil and administrative law. The Criminal Law Convention on Corruption ([ETS No. 173](#)) of 27 January 1999 and an Additional Protocol ([ETS 191](#)) provide for measures to be taken at national level for active and passive bribery of domestic public officials, members of domestic public assemblies, and international parliamentary assemblies and officials of international organisations. Its preamble emphasizes that “corruption threatens the rule of law, democracy and human rights, undermines good governance, fairness and social justice, distorts competition, hinders economic development and endangers the stability of democratic institutions and the moral foundations of society.” The Civil Law Convention on Corruption ([ETS No. 174](#)) of 4 November 1999 requires each Party to “provide in its internal law for effective remedies for persons who have suffered damage as a result of acts of corruption, to enable them to defend their rights and interests, including the possibility of obtaining compensation for damage”. It deals in particular with liability (including State liability for acts of corruption committed by public officials) and international cooperation. The Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) monitors commitments entered into under both Conventions by the States Party.

16. Those treaties are complemented by the following legal instruments:

- Twenty Guiding Principles for the fight against Corruption (Committee of Ministers Resolution(97) 24);
- Recommendation on Codes of Conduct for Public Officials (including a model code) (Committee of Ministers recommendation to member States No. R(2000) 10);
- Recommendation on Common Rules against Corruption in the Funding of Political Parties and Electoral Campaigns (Committee of Ministers recommendation to member States Rec(2003)4).

17. GRECO’s fourth Evaluation Round on the Prevention of corruption in respect of, *inter alia*, members of parliament and its fifth round on Preventing corruption and promoting integrity in central governments (top executive functions) are particularly relevant and have led to detailed guidance on the implementation of the relevant legal standards.¹⁷ In both evaluation rounds, GRECO’s country-specific reports often included guidance on issues including procedural transparency, remuneration and benefits, codes of conduct, conflicts of interest, declarations of assets, prohibited or restricted activities, and oversight and enforcement mechanisms. In its October 2017 report on “Corruption Prevention: Members of Parliament, Judges and Prosecutors – Conclusions and Trends”, GRECO noted that “The overwhelming conclusion with respect to the 4th Round is that while solid foundations have been laid in most jurisdictions to tackle corruption, including examples of good (even excellent) practices, there is an overall lack of regard to effective implementation. One in every five recommendations refers to supervision and enforcement of the legislative framework in place. This is a clear sign that the actual implementation of the existing rules and regulations is an area of concern for each group under GRECO’s review.” This report found that “the great bulk of recommendations for MPs refer to three main areas: supervision and enforcement, incompatibilities and rules of conduct.”

18. The [Rule of Law Checklist](#) adopted in 2016 was elaborated by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) as an operational tool for assessing the level of Rule of Law compliance in member States. It covers issues such as the prevention of abuse or the misuse of powers, corruption and conflict of interest. The Venice Commission has also adopted reports on [the “scope and lifting of parliamentary immunities”](#) (2014) and the [“exclusion of offenders from parliament”](#) (2018). Its [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) further states that “provision may be made for depriving individuals of their right to [...] be elected, but only subject to the following cumulative conditions [inter alia] it must be provided for by law; the proportionality principle must be observed [...]” such deprivation may be based on a criminal conviction for a serious offence, potentially including corruption or money-laundering.

19. On combating money laundering, the Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism (CETS No. 198, “Warsaw Convention”) provides useful guidance. The Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism - MONEYVAL - is a permanent monitoring body of the Council of Europe entrusted with the task of assessing compliance with the principal international standards to counter money laundering and the financing of terrorism and the effectiveness of their implementation, as well as with

¹⁶ *Matanović v. Croatia*, App. No. 2742/12, judgment of 04 April 2017, para. 144. *Wypych v. Poland*, App. No. 2428/05, decision of 25 October 2005.

¹⁷ GRECO, webpage on [Evaluations](#).

the task of making recommendations to national authorities in respect of necessary improvements to their systems. Evaluations are undertaken on the basis of the [Financial Action Task Force \(FATF\) 2012 Recommendations](#). In order to strengthen the fight against corruption and money laundering, the Assembly, in [Resolution 2218 \(2018\)](#), has also recommended that member states consider reversing the burden of proof for the confiscation of illegal assets, in line with the Irish and Italian examples that the Court has found compatible with the presumption of innocence (Article 6 paragraph 2 of the Convention) and the protection of property (first Protocol Article 1 of the Convention).

20. The Assembly's ethical standards for members are set out in the Rules of procedure, with its appended Code of conduct for members. Pursuant to paragraph 17 of the Code of conduct, members are required to declare every year any remunerated professional activities, offices and positions, in the public or private sector, regular or occasional, whether as an employee, liberal professional or as a self-employed person, including the parliamentary mandate and local elective offices, and any other interests. At the request of the Chairperson of the Rules Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly (later President of the Assembly), Ms Liliane Maury Pasquier (Switzerland, SOC), GRECO assessed the Assembly's Code of Conduct, notably as regards the issues related to conflict of interest; declaration of assets, income, liabilities and interests; prohibition or restriction of certain activities; effectiveness of supervision and enforcement mechanisms; and advice, training and awareness. In its assessment,¹⁸ GRECO found that as a regulatory framework, the 2015 compendium on the Code of Conduct needed improvement. In 2017, the Assembly addressed GRECO's concerns by providing for new rules of conduct and declaratory requirements to prevent possible future corruption in the Assembly¹⁹.

21. In response to the IBAC report and conclusions concerning the individual conduct of members or former members, the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs convened two hearings in order to hear the Assembly members concerned and decided to take action (i.e. stripping titles of Honorary Associate of the Parliamentary Assembly, and depriving of the right to access the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly premises for life), within the strict framework of the Assembly's ethical regulations. The Assembly recalled in 2018 the "principle of individual political responsibility, including the possibility for those elected to relinquish their mandate". The Assembly also invited "political groups of the Assembly, as well as the political groups within the national parliaments, to each draw the consequences of any allegations against their members".²⁰ Also noteworthy, is the Assembly's anti-corruption platform launched on 8 April 2014 in Strasbourg, to create a space for dialogue on how to deal with new forms of corruption, and help promote transparency and honesty in public life. A series of seminars and workshops – with a regional or national focus – were already organised or are planned on topics such as: Mechanisms available to national parliaments to counter corruption, Code of conduct for parliamentarians, The integrity of parliamentary staff. This platform is currently dormant for lack of adequate resources.²¹

5. Conclusions and next steps

22. Political life in Council of Europe member States remains a prey to corruption. The recent corruption scandals mentioned in this document are certainly far from exhaustive. They demonstrate the need to reform whole systems, and to analyse the adequacy of national anti-corruption mechanisms and procedures.

23. The Assembly has long been committed to "restoring trust in the efficiency and effectiveness of democratic institutions [as] a priority for all European democracies, including European institutions",²² encouraging member States to "remain at the forefront of the fight against corruption".²³

24. The Assembly has also recalled that politicians should be accountable for ordinary criminal acts in the same way as ordinary citizens. Any distinction between political decision making and criminal acts or omissions must be based on national law.²⁴ I aim to continue my research on how to prevent political leaders from abusing power for personal gain and to ensure the highest ethical standards in public life.

¹⁸ GRECO, *Assessment of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*, June 2017.

¹⁹ Assembly [Resolution 2182 \(2017\)](#) "Follow-up to [Resolution 1903 \(2012\)](#): promoting and strengthening transparency, accountability and integrity of Parliamentary Assembly members".

²⁰ Op. cit. [Resolution 2216 \(2018\)](#).

²¹ See the Platform's [webpage](#). See also, the Handbook for Parliamentarians, *Introduction to the activities of the PACE anti-corruption platform*, 2014.

²² Op. cit. [Resolution 2170 \(2017\)](#).

²³ Op. cit. [Resolution 1943 \(2013\)](#).

²⁴ Assembly [Resolution 1950\(2013\)](#) "Keeping political and criminal responsibility separate".

25. To prepare my future report, I propose to organise hearings with experts at forthcoming committee meetings, with representatives of GRECO, Moneyval, the World Bank, Transparency International, and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ).