

Azerbaijan Continues to Lead the Fight Against Corruption in CIS

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On April 4, 2022, His Excellency Mr. Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, issued a decree approving the country's National Action Plan to Strengthen the Fight Against Corruption for the period 2022-2026 (the "National Action Plan"). Already ranked first among the Commonwealth of Independent States ("CIS") countries and top-10 out of 50 Member States of the Council of Europe for its implementation of key recommendations to strengthen the prevention of corruption, the National Action Plan demonstrates a clear and commendable commitment by Azerbaijan to continue actively leading the fight against corruption in CIS.

Azerbaijan's Strong History Combatting Corruption

Back in 2003, Azerbaijan acceded to the [Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan](#), a sub-regional peer review program supporting anticorruption reforms through country reviews evaluating legal and institutional anticorruption frameworks and continuous monitoring of the implementation of recommendations promoting the [United Nations \("UN"\) Convention Against Corruption \("UNCAC"\)](#) and other international anticorruption best practices. (Negotiated by UN Member States, adopted by the UN General Assembly in October 2003, and in force since December 2005, UNCAC remains the only legally binding multilateral treaty on anticorruption.) [Azerbaijan has actively taken part in the monitoring rounds](#) ever since 2003.

In 2011, Global Integrity, an independent non-profit organization situated just a few blocks from the White House in Washington, D.C. that supports worldwide progress towards open, accountable and effective governance, [rated Azerbaijan's anticorruption legislative framework strongly](#), scoring it 89 out of 100. Also in 2011, Azerbaijan joined the [Open Government Partnership \(OGP\)](#), a multilateral initiative headquartered in D.C. that aims to secure commitments from national and sub-national governments to promote open government, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies strengthening governance.

The GRECO Evaluation

[The Group of States against Corruption \(“GRECO”\)](#) is the Council of Europe’s anticorruption body. GRECO’s main role is to assist Member States to tackle corruption by monitoring their compliance with the organization’s anticorruption standards, which it does primarily by means of mutual evaluations comprising onsite meetings with numerous interlocutors, government officials, civil society representatives, academics and more, with a view to prompting the legislative, institutional and/or practical reforms that may be necessary to close any identified “gaps” or vulnerabilities. [GRECO currently consists of 50 members](#), including Azerbaijan and all other Council of Europe members, and since membership is also open to non-European States, the United States of America. Notably, [GRECO recently graded Azerbaijan](#) 7th best in total and 1st among the CIS countries in terms of actions taken to implement GRECO’s anticorruption recommendations.

In particular, GRECO hailed recent reforms in Azerbaijan’s legislative procedures that have maximized transparency. Under an updated legislative framework, all draft laws are published promptly on the Parliament’s website and stakeholder comments are collected through various channels, aggregated, and submitted to the responsible committees for discussion. Further, GRECO commended revised Parliamentary regulations governing public hearings, and welcomed the adoption of a new Law on Rules of Ethical Conduct of Deputies. The GRECO evaluation is an indicator that Azerbaijan’s anticorruption efforts comport with international standards.

The National Action Plan

[The National Action Plan](#) is yet another positive and proactive step by Azerbaijan to stifle corruption. In overview, the National Action Plan highlights six key focuses for the state during the next four years. Those focuses are: (i) further enhancing the country’s legislative framework; (ii) maximizing transparency; (iii) targeting money laundering and terror financing; (iv) improving public oversight and participation; (v) cooperating domestically and nationally with civil society institutions; and (vi) promoting anticorruption awareness.

Of note, limb (i) focuses on promulgating legislation to encourage and protect whistleblowers who speak up in respect of corruption-related offences. While Azerbaijan’s current legislation already protects whistleblowers, the National Action Plan calls for the fortification of those existing protections. This is significant because whistleblowing is widely accepted as being one of the most effective ways to detect and discourage corruption and other malpractice.

Regarding limb (iii), the National Action Plan calls for the continued implementation of the [Financial Action Task Force \(“FATF”\) Recommendations](#), which are internationally endorsed global standards against money laundering and terror financing. This is timely, since [FATF’s mutual evaluation or peer review](#) of Azerbaijan’s implementation and effectiveness of measures to combat money laundering and terror financing, which is being conducted by FATF regional body MONEYVAL, is underway.

Additional Considerations

Corruption is one of the most insidious social phenomena. [According to the International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#), corruption discourages investment, limits economic growth, and alters the composition of government spending, often detrimentally. [According to the World Bank](#), corruption fuels and perpetuates the inequalities and discontent that lead to fragility, violent extremism, and conflict.

In this context, Azerbaijan should be praised for its leading regional role in the fight against

corruption. Azerbaijan has striven for years to implement international best practices and refuses to rest on its laurels. Instead, His Excellency President Aliyev has sought to enshrine the principles of transparency and accountability, empower the right to speak up, and safeguard civil society institutions. The effects of this will be to instill public trust, uphold democracy and the rule of law, and ensure the sustainability of open government and, ultimately, Azerbaijan's economic development in years to come.

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