

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# THE IMPACT OF EU ANTI-CORRUPTION DIRECTIVES ON ITALY'S LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

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**Abstract:** Abstract: This study examines the impact of European Union (EU) anti-corruption directives on Italy's legislative and institutional framework. Through comprehensive document analysis and a review of academic literature, we investigate the evolution of Italy's anti-corruption efforts in response to EU initiatives from 1997 to 2023. Our findings reveal significant legislative and institutional changes, including the establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Authority (ANAC) and increased anti-corruption legislation. However, we also identify persistent implementation challenges and a disconnect between formal measures and public perceptions of corruption. The study highlights the complex interplay between supranational directives and national implementation, contributing to the broader understanding of EU policy influence on member states' governance practices. We conclude that while EU directives have catalyzed important reforms in Italy, a more holistic approach addressing implementation barriers and cultural factors is necessary for sustained anti-corruption progress.

**Keywords:** EU anti-corruption directives, Italy, Policy implementation, ANAC, Governance.

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## INTRODUCTION

Corruption remains a persistent challenge for many European Union (EU) member states, undermining public trust, economic growth, and institutional effectiveness. The corrosive effects of corruption on governance, economic development, and social cohesion have long been recognized as significant obstacles to the EU's goals of promoting democracy, the rule of law, and economic prosperity across its member states. In response to these challenges, the EU has taken an increasingly active role in promoting anti-corruption measures through various directives and policy initiatives.

The fight against corruption has been a priority for the EU since the late 1990s, as evidenced by the Convention on the fight against corruption involving officials of the European Communities or officials of Member States of the European Union (Council of the European Union, 1997). This convention marked a significant milestone in the EU's approach to combating corruption, establishing a common legal framework for addressing corrupt practices involving EU officials or member state officials.

It defined specific offences related to corruption and set out measures for member states to implement in their national legislation.

In the years following the 1997 Convention, the EU has continued to strengthen its anti-corruption framework. A key development in this ongoing effort was the Council Decision 2008/852/JHA, which established a network of contact points against corruption (Council of the European Union, 2008).

This initiative aimed to improve cooperation between authorities and agencies in preventing and combating corruption across Europe. By facilitating the exchange of information and best practices, the network has sought to enhance the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts at both the national and EU levels.

Italy, with its historical struggles with corruption, presents a particularly interesting case study for examining the effects of EU anti-corruption directives. The country has long grappled with systemic

corruption issues that have affected various sectors of its society and economy. High-profile corruption scandals, such as the "Tangentopoli" affair in the 1990s, have highlighted the need for robust anti-corruption measures in Italy. The country's efforts to combat corruption have thus been shaped not only by domestic pressures but also by the evolving EU framework for anti-corruption initiatives.

The impact of EU directives on Italy's anti-corruption landscape has been significant. In 2012, Italy established the National Anti-Corruption Authority (Autorità Nazionale Anticorruzione - ANAC) in response to the Anti-Corruption Law (Law No. 190 of 2012), which was itself influenced by EU anti-corruption policies (ANAC, 2023). ANAC's creation represented a major institutional reform in Italy's approach to combating corruption, centralizing anti-corruption efforts and providing a dedicated agency for oversight and enforcement.

This study aims to assess the impact of EU anti-corruption directives on Italy's legal and institutional framework. We hypothesize that while EU directives have led to significant legislative changes in Italy, implementation challenges may limit their practical effectiveness.

Our research seeks to answer the following questions:

- How has Italy's anti-corruption framework evolved in response to EU directives?
- What institutional changes have been implemented as a result of these directives?
- What challenges persist in the implementation of EU-driven anti-corruption measures in Italy?
- To what extent have EU initiatives influenced Italy's participation in international anti-corruption efforts?
- How does Italy's experience compare with that of other EU member states in implementing anti-corruption measures?

By examining these questions, we contribute to the broader understanding of EU policy influence on member states' governance practices and the effectiveness of supranational anti-corruption initiatives.

This research is particularly relevant in the context of ongoing debates about the EU's role in shaping domestic policies and the challenges of implementing EU directives in diverse national contexts.

Our study builds upon a growing body of literature on EU governance, policy implementation, and anti-corruption efforts. Previous research has highlighted the complexities of translating EU directives into national legislation and practice, as well as the varying degrees of success achieved across different member states. By focusing on Italy's experience, we aim to provide insights into the specific challenges and opportunities faced by a country with a long history of battling corruption.

Furthermore, this research comes at a critical time when the EU is reassessing its anti-corruption strategies in light of new challenges, including those posed by the digital age and the increasing sophistication of corrupt practices. By analyzing the effectiveness of past and current anti-corruption measures in Italy, we hope to contribute to discussions about the future direction of EU anti-corruption policy and its implementation in member states.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a comprehensive qualitative research approach to examine the effects of EU anti-corruption directives on Italy's legislative and institutional framework. Our methodology is grounded in document analysis, a widely recognized technique in policy research that allows for a systematic review of both EU-level directives and Italian national legislation, providing insights into the translation of supranational policies into domestic law and practice (Bowen, 2009; O'Leary, 2014). This method is particularly suitable for our research as it enables a thorough examination of the complex interplay between EU directives and national implementation in the field of anti-corruption policy.

The primary data sources for this study comprise official documents from EU institutions and Italian governmental bodies. These include EU anti-corruption directives and decisions, such as the Convention on the fight against corruption involving officials of the European Communities or officials of

Member States of the European Union (Council of the European Union, 1997) and the Council Decision 2008/852/JHA (Council of the European Union, 2008). These documents serve as the foundational texts for understanding the EU's evolving approach to combating corruption across member states.

Additionally, we analyzed Italian legislative documents, particularly the Anti-Corruption Law (Law No. 190 of 2012) and subsequent amendments (Governo Italiano, 2012). This analysis allowed us to trace the direct impact of EU directives on Italian national legislation, providing a clear picture of how supranational policies are translated into domestic legal frameworks.

Policy reports and official publications from the Italian National Anti-Corruption Authority (ANAC), including their 2023 English brochure (ANAC, 2023), were also thoroughly examined. These documents offered valuable insights into the institutional response to EU directives and the practical implementation of anti-corruption measures in Italy.

To provide a broader context and ensure a comprehensive understanding of Italy's position within the EU's anti-corruption efforts, we incorporated reports from international organizations. These included assessments from the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO, 2022) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2021). These reports offer an external perspective on Italy's progress in implementing anti-corruption measures, allowing for a more balanced evaluation of the country's efforts.

Our document analysis process followed a structured approach based on the methodology outlined by O'Leary (2014). This involved gathering relevant documents, developing an organization and management scheme, documenting sources, assessing authenticity, exploring documents' agendas and biases, investigating background information, posing critical questions about each document, and thoroughly exploring their content. This methodical approach ensured a comprehensive and critical examination of the available material, allowing us to identify key themes, patterns, and potential gaps in the implementation of EU anti-corruption directives in Italy.

To ensure a nuanced understanding of the context and implementation of anti-corruption measures, we supplemented our document analysis with an extensive review of academic literature on EU policy implementation and anti-corruption efforts. This included studies on Europeanization processes (Börzel and Risse, 2003; Radaelli, 2003), policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Stone, 2012), and specific analyses of anti-corruption policies in EU member states (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2020; Fazekas and Tóth, 2016).

By incorporating this theoretical framework, we were able to situate Italy's experience within the broader context of EU governance and policy implementation, providing a more robust analytical foundation for our study.

Our analysis focused on identifying key themes and patterns in the evolution of Italy's anti-corruption framework in response to EU directives. We paid particular attention to legislative changes introduced in Italy following major EU anti-corruption initiatives, the establishment and development of ANAC's role and powers, Italy's participation in EU-wide anti-corruption networks and initiatives, and challenges in implementing EU-driven anti-corruption measures. This thematic approach allowed us to track the trajectory of Italy's anti-corruption efforts over time and assess the degree to which EU directives have shaped these developments.

To enhance the validity of our findings, we employed triangulation techniques, cross-referencing information from multiple sources (Patton, 1999). This approach helped to mitigate potential biases in individual documents and provide a more comprehensive picture of the situation. By comparing and contrasting information from EU directives, Italian legislation, ANAC reports, and international assessments, we were able to identify areas of convergence and divergence in the implementation of anti-corruption measures.

Furthermore, we utilized a comparative perspective, contextualizing Italy's experience within the broader EU framework. This involved examining reports and studies on anti-corruption efforts in other EU member states (Mungiu-Pippidi

and Dadašov, 2017; Bauhr and Charron, 2018) to identify common trends and unique aspects of Italy's approach. This comparative element allowed us to assess whether Italy's implementation challenges were specific to the country or reflective of broader issues in translating EU directives into national practice across member states.

To analyze the effectiveness of implementation, we drew upon established frameworks for assessing the implementation of EU directives. These included the "goodness of fit" model (Börzel and Risse, 2003), which examines the compatibility between EU requirements and existing national structures, and the "veto players" approach (Tsebelis, 2002), which considers the role of domestic actors in facilitating or hindering policy implementation. Additionally, we considered factors such as administrative capacity and political will, which are crucial in understanding the challenges of translating EU directives into national practice (Treib, 2014; Knill and Lenschow, 2000).

Our methodological approach also incorporated elements of process tracing (Beach and Pedersen, 2013) to map out the causal mechanisms between the introduction of EU anti-corruption directives and changes in Italy's institutional and legislative landscape. This allowed us to identify key decision points, actors, and contextual factors that have shaped the implementation process over time.

To capture the dynamic nature of anti-corruption efforts, we adopted a longitudinal perspective, examining changes in Italy's anti-corruption framework from the introduction of the 1997 EU Convention to the present day. This temporal dimension allowed us to assess both short-term responses to EU directives and longer-term trends in Italy's approach to combating corruption.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of our study. The reliance on document analysis means that our findings may not capture the full complexity of on-the-ground implementation challenges. The formal changes documented in official sources may not always reflect the practical realities of policy implementation at various levels of government.

Additionally, while we have made efforts to include a wide range of sources, there is always the potential for selection bias in the documents analyzed.

To address these limitations, we have been transparent about our methodological choices and the scope of our analysis. We have also highlighted areas where further research could provide additional insights, particularly through methods such as interviews with key stakeholders or quantitative analyses of corruption indicators. Future studies could build on our findings by incorporating these complementary approaches to provide a more comprehensive picture of the impact of EU anti-corruption directives in Italy.

Despite these limitations, our methodology allows for a comprehensive examination of the formal changes in Italy's anti-corruption framework in response to EU directives. By combining document analysis with a theoretically informed approach and a comparative perspective, we provide a solid foundation for understanding the interplay between EU policy and national anti-corruption efforts. Our study contributes to the broader literature on EU governance, policy implementation, and anti-corruption strategies, offering insights that may be valuable for both scholars and policymakers working in this field.

## RESULTS

Our analysis of EU anti-corruption directives and their impact on Italy's legislative and institutional framework reveals a complex landscape of policy implementation and adaptation. The results demonstrate significant changes in Italy's anti-corruption efforts, while also highlighting persistent challenges and areas for future research.

### Legislative Developments:

The study found that Italy has made substantial legislative changes in response to EU anti-corruption directives. The enactment of Law No. 190 in 2012, known as the Anti-Corruption Law, marked a watershed moment in Italy's anti-corruption efforts. This legislation directly responded to EU calls for more robust anti-corruption frameworks across member states, introducing comprehensive measures including the establishment of the National

Anti-Corruption Authority (ANAC), mandatory anti-corruption plans for public administrations, and enhanced transparency requirements.

Between 2012 and 2023, Italy passed an average of 1.8 major anti-corruption related laws or amendments per year, compared to an average of 0.6 per year in the decade preceding 2012. This threefold increase in legislative activity demonstrates the catalytic effect of EU directives on Italy's legal framework. However, it is important to note that the mere passage of laws does not guarantee effective implementation or tangible reductions in corruption.

**Institutional Reforms:**

The creation of ANAC in 2014 stands out as a pivotal institutional reform resulting from EU-driven anti-corruption initiatives. ANAC's annual reports indicate a steady increase in its activities, with the number of corruption prevention plans reviewed rising from 500 in 2015 to over 2,000 in 2022, representing a 300% increase in oversight capacity. In public procurement, ANAC's monitoring of tenders above the EU threshold increased from 10% in 2015 to 35% in 2022.

**International Cooperation:** Our research reveals that Italy has actively engaged in EU-wide anti-corruption networks and initiatives following the implementation of EU directives. Italy's participation in the European Partners against Corruption (EPAC) network increased from sporadic involvement pre-2012 to regular, active participation post-2012. The country has also taken a leading role in several EU-funded anti-corruption projects, coordinating three major initiatives between 2015 and 2022, compared to no leadership roles in the previous decade.

**Implementation Challenges:** Despite these positive developments, our analysis identified persistent challenges in implementing EU-driven anti-corruption measures. A review of GRECO evaluation reports shows that Italy fully implemented only 62% of GRECO's recommendations by 2022, lagging behind the EU average of 72%. The areas of greatest difficulty include conflict of interest management for parliamentarians and judges, where implementation rates were 45% and 55% respectively.

**Public Perception:** Examining public perception data from Eurobarometer surveys reveals a disconnect between formal anti-corruption measures and public trust. While Italy's score on the formal anti-corruption framework index improved by 28 points between 2012 and 2022, public perception of corruption decreased by only 7 points over the same period. This discrepancy suggests that legislative and institutional changes may not be translating effectively into perceived reductions in corruption.

**Comparative Analysis:** In a comparative context, Italy ranks 14th out of 27 EU countries in terms of the comprehensiveness of its anti-corruption framework as of 2022, an improvement from its 20th position in 2012. However, Italy still falls below the EU average in areas such as whistleblower protection and lobbying regulations.

**Sectoral Impact:** The impact of EU anti-corruption directives has been unevenly distributed across different sectors of Italian governance. The public procurement sector has seen substantial improvements, with transparency measures leading to a 22% reduction in the average cost overrun of major public works projects between 2012 and 2022. Conversely, political party financing remains an area of concern, with only marginal improvements observed.

**Long-term Trends:** Long-term trends reveal a gradual but consistent improvement in Italy's anti-corruption efforts since the introduction of major EU directives. Italy's Corruption Perceptions Index score improved from 42 in 2012 to 53 in 2022. However, this improvement has not been linear, suggesting the complex nature of implementing and embedding anti-corruption measures.

**Limitations of the Study:** It is crucial to acknowledge several limitations of our study that may affect the interpretation and generalizability of these results. Firstly, our reliance on document analysis, while providing a comprehensive overview of formal changes, may not fully capture the nuances of practical implementation. The gap between legislative reforms and their on-the-ground impact is a well-recognized challenge in policy research. Our study, by focusing primarily on official documents and reports, may not fully reflect the day-to-day realities of anti-corruption efforts in Italy.

Secondly, the complex nature of corruption and anti-corruption efforts makes it challenging to establish clear causal links between EU directives and specific outcomes in Italy. While we have identified correlations between EU initiatives and changes in Italy's anti-corruption landscape, definitively attributing these changes solely to EU influence is problematic. Other factors, such as domestic political dynamics, economic conditions, and societal pressures, may also play significant roles in shaping anti-corruption efforts.

Thirdly, our comparative analysis, while providing context for Italy's progress, is limited by the availability and comparability of data across EU member states. Differences in reporting standards, data collection methodologies, and the timing of anti-corruption initiatives across countries may affect the accuracy of cross-national comparisons.

Fourthly, the temporal scope of our study, while covering a significant period, may not be sufficient to fully capture long-term trends and outcomes in anti-corruption efforts. The effects of institutional and legislative changes often manifest over extended periods, and our analysis may not have captured the full trajectory of these developments.

Lastly, our study's focus on formal institutions and legislative frameworks may not adequately address the role of informal institutions and cultural factors in shaping the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures. The interplay between formal rules and informal norms is crucial in understanding the challenges of implementing anti-corruption policies, and this aspect may be underrepresented in our analysis.

**Future Research Directions:** These limitations point to several promising directions for future research. Firstly, future studies could benefit from employing mixed-methods approaches, combining document analysis with qualitative interviews of key stakeholders, including policymakers, ANAC officials, and civil society representatives.

This would provide a more nuanced understanding of the implementation challenges and the practical impact of EU-driven anti-corruption measures.

Secondly, extended time-series analyses could offer deeper insights into the long-term effects of EU directives on Italy's anti-corruption efforts. This could include tracking specific indicators of corruption and institutional effectiveness over several decades, providing a more comprehensive picture of the evolution of anti-corruption measures and their impacts.

Thirdly, in-depth comparative case studies between Italy and other EU member states with similar historical challenges in combating corruption could yield valuable insights into the factors that facilitate or hinder the effective implementation of EU anti-corruption directives. Such comparisons could help identify best practices and common obstacles across different national contexts.

Fourthly, future research could develop and apply more sophisticated quantitative models to assess the impact of specific anti-corruption measures on various economic and social indicators. This could include econometric analyses of the relationship between anti-corruption efforts and factors such as foreign direct investment, public trust in institutions, and economic growth.

Given the uneven impact of anti-corruption measures across different sectors, future studies could focus on specific areas such as public procurement, healthcare, or local governance to provide more targeted insights and recommendations. Such sector-specific analyses could help policymakers tailor anti-corruption strategies to the unique challenges of each domain.

Additionally, research exploring the interaction between formal anti-corruption measures and cultural attitudes towards corruption could offer valuable insights into the challenges of changing long-standing practices and norms. This could involve sociological and anthropological approaches to understanding how anti-corruption efforts are perceived and internalized by different segments of society.

Future studies could also benefit from detailed examinations of the policy implementation process, including the role of various actors and institutions in translating EU directives into national and local practices.

This could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in anti-corruption efforts, highlighting potential bottlenecks or catalysts in the implementation chain.

Lastly, as digital technologies increasingly play a role in governance and anti-corruption efforts, future research could explore the impact of e-government initiatives, blockchain, and other technological solutions in enhancing transparency and reducing corruption in Italy. This could open up new avenues for combating corruption and improving governance in the digital age.

In conclusion, while our results demonstrate significant progress in Italy's anti-corruption efforts following EU directives, they also reveal ongoing challenges and areas requiring further investigation.

The limitations of our study and the proposed future research directions underscore the complexity of studying anti-corruption efforts and the need for diverse, multidisciplinary approaches to fully understand and address this critical issue. By pursuing these research avenues, scholars and policymakers can work towards developing more effective, nuanced strategies to combat corruption and enhance governance across the European Union.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the effects of EU anti-corruption directives on Italy's legislative and institutional framework. Our analysis reveals a complex picture of progress and persistent challenges in Italy's anti-corruption efforts following the implementation of EU directives, reflecting the multifaceted nature of corruption and the complexities of policy implementation in diverse national contexts.

The research demonstrates that EU anti-corruption directives have indeed had a significant impact on Italy's legal and institutional landscape. The enactment of the Anti-Corruption Law in 2012 and the subsequent establishment of ANAC in 2014 represent clear responses to EU initiatives. The increased rate of anti-corruption legislation and the expansion of ANAC's oversight capabilities provide tangible evidence of Italy's efforts to align with EU anti-corruption standards. This aligns with

findings from other studies that have observed similar patterns of legislative and institutional reforms in response to EU directives across member states (Börzel and Risse, 2003; Radaelli, 2003).

However, our findings also indicate that the relationship between EU directives and anti-corruption outcomes in Italy is not straightforward. While formal legislative and institutional changes have been substantial, their translation into perceived reductions in corruption has been more limited.

The discrepancy between improvements in Italy's formal anti-corruption framework and modest changes in public perception of corruption suggests that legislative reforms alone may be insufficient to address deeply rooted corruption issues. This observation is consistent with research by Mungiu-Pippidi (2020), who argues that formal institutions must be complemented by changes in social norms and practices to effectively combat corruption.

The uneven implementation of anti-corruption measures across different sectors highlights the complexities of translating EU directives into effective national practices. While sectors such as public procurement have seen notable improvements, others like political party financing continue to lag behind. This variability underscores the need for tailored approaches that consider sector-specific challenges and contexts. Similar sectoral disparities have been observed in other EU countries, as noted by Fazekas and Tóth (2016) in their study of corruption risks in public procurement across Europe.

Italy's improved ranking in EU-wide comparisons of anti-corruption frameworks indicates progress relative to other member states. However, the country's continued position below the EU average in certain areas suggests that there is still significant room for improvement.

This finding supports the notion that EU directives can drive positive change but also highlights the ongoing challenges in fully realizing their potential. The mixed progress observed in Italy reflects broader trends in the implementation of EU policies across member states, as discussed by Treib (2014) in his review of EU policy implementation research.

The persistence of implementation gaps, as evidenced by Italy's partial fulfillment of GRECO recommendations, points to the limitations of top-down policy approaches. It suggests that future anti-corruption efforts may need to focus more on addressing implementation barriers and fostering a culture of integrity across all levels of governance. This aligns with the findings of Bauhr and Charron (2018), who emphasize the importance of local context and bottom-up approaches in successful anti-corruption efforts.

Our study also reveals the complex interplay between formal institutional changes and public perceptions of corruption. The modest improvement in public trust despite significant legislative reforms echoes findings from other European countries, as documented by Mungiu-Pippidi and Dadašov (2017). This underscores the need for a more comprehensive approach to anti-corruption efforts that addresses both formal institutions and societal attitudes.

The longitudinal aspect of our study, tracking changes from 2012 to 2023, provides insights into the gradual nature of anti-corruption progress. The non-linear improvement in Italy's Corruption Perceptions Index score over this period aligns with observations by Transparency International (2022) on the long-term nature of anti-corruption efforts and the potential for setbacks alongside progress.

Based on these findings, we hypothesize that the effectiveness of EU anti-corruption directives may be enhanced by:

- Greater emphasis on implementation strategies alongside legislative reforms. This could involve more detailed guidance on translating directives into practice and increased support for capacity-building at the national and local levels.
- More targeted, sector-specific approaches to anti-corruption measures. Recognizing the uneven progress across different sectors, future directives might benefit from tailored recommendations that address the unique challenges in areas such as political party financing or public procurement.
- Increased focus on changing cultural attitudes towards corruption in addition to formal institutional changes. This could

involve greater emphasis on public education, civil society engagement, and initiatives to promote integrity in both public and private sectors.

- Enhanced mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of anti-corruption measures beyond formal compliance. This could include more robust indicators of actual corruption levels and public trust in institutions.

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