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If you define corruption as a way of living where bribery, fraud, and conflicts of interest are part of the day-to-day living, Belgium is not corrupt. This does not mean that there is no bribery and fraud. In the defence branch, we experienced both at the highest levels in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. From the end of the ‘90s onwards, Belgium adopted several international treaties on corruption, converted all European Union legislation into Belgian legislation, and created a special police unit on corruption and fraud, the so-called Central Office for the Fight against Corruption.

Based on recent GRECO reports, we can fairly say that corruption is not a big issue in Belgium. We are glad to see that the investigations of Transparency International come to similar conclusions on the DoD level. The authors and reviewers have been rightly severe. It is not enough that we see no bribery today, we have to close all doors to prevent future bribery. Fraud and bribery not only are bad for the direct commercial activities and for the tax payer, they influence the reputation of the institution and the nation. How can we trust an army if its leaders and administration are corrupt?

After the DoD was confronted with fraud some ten years ago, there has been a lot of effort to create institutional control measures, like regular audits. It has to be part of the mindset of all chiefs and leaders, at whatever level they are, to constantly control and check the workflow and the processes. Senior management should stimulate this and keep on repeating the importance of control, even if there seems to be no immediate necessity.

Budgets and public procurement procedures have become extremely complicated. This should not be a reason to leave it in the hands of only a few specialists, even if these specialists are trying to make the best of it for their organization. The DoD has to see if the solution presented by Transparency International can contribute to greater clarity.

It certainly helps to avoid bribery if personnel have a decent salary and if they are paid correctly and on time. Although the salary-administration of the DoD has an excellent reputation, it has been noticed by Transparency International that opportunities for corruption still exist. The DoD has to verify whether this needs attention.

The Belgian Defense has been involved in a multitude of operations abroad for the last two decades. Even if corruption is not standard in our own country, military personnel operate in countries with different rules. It is important that Belgian military personnel engaged in operations keep up the reputation of their home nations and the organizations that they represent. It has to be investigated by DoD if the conclusions of Transparency International stand on this point.

The fight against corruption does not stop with this report. Future investigations are needed to keep everybody alert to corruption risks. If reports can help to keep the flame burning, we should be pleased that organizations keep on investigating.