

## Oh No: Greeks Can No Longer Afford to Pay Expensive Bribes

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Greeks, whose country is facing bankruptcy, can no longer afford the expensive customary cash-filled "fakelaki" or "little envelope" bribes paid to public sector workers, according to an official.

Greece, solely dependent on international aid to remain solvent, has struggled for decades with rampant corruption that has hampered efforts to raise taxes and reform its stricken economy.

The health sector and the tax authorities topped the country's corruption rankings for 2011, said a report by Leandros Rakintzis, tasked with uncovering wrongdoing in the public sector.

"While the crisis has not reduced corruption itself, it has reduced the price of corruption," Rakintzis told Skai TV after publishing his annual report.

"They (civil servants) have lowered their price," he added.

Greeks have suffered steep cuts to pensions and wages as part of austerity measures demanded by the EU and International Monetary Fund in exchange for aid.

The country's worst economic crisis since World War Two has helped push the economy into a fifth year of recession and forced thousands of businesses to close, putting one in five Greeks out of a job.

As the crisis deepens, more and more Greeks find themselves no longer able to pay expensive bribes, Rakintzis said.

"There are no longer serious corruption offences. There is no money for major wrongdoings," he was quoted as saying by Proto Thema newspaper.

Out of 1,403 corruption cases examined, 393 were referred to prosecutors. The worst offenders were officials working at the tax authority as well as high ranking civil servants with many years of work experience, the report found.

In one incident, a tax office official gave her fiancé proof of tax clearance even though he never submitted his tax return and had arrears amounting to 178,863 euros.

In another example, a Foreign Ministry official issued visas without carrying out necessary checks.

Overhauling its tax system and improving its public sector are among a long list of reforms Greece's foreign lenders have long demanded the country push through.

"The struggle (against corruption) is not easy but long, difficult and painful and demands persistent political will because it faces many hurdles," Rakintzis wrote in the report, citing red tape and lawsuits filed by the accused.