

For all Cameron's fine words the UK remains a major obs...

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There is a G7 heads of state meeting in Brussels this week: since last year the organisation has laid Russia aside and reverted to its old title.

In advance of the meeting David Cameron (or, rather, his staff) has [written a piece for the Wall Street Journal](#) in which he bigs up the achievements of last year's G8, which I attended. I could spend hours pointing out the disparities and straightforward errors in the claims that he makes; they are legion. But, in the interests of time and retaining interest let me compare and contrast on two issues.

Cameron says:

The best way to fight corruption and drive growth is through what I call the three Ts: greater transparency, fair tax systems and freer trade.

We need greater transparency over the ownership of companies and the use of natural resources to stop corrupt officials, oligarchs and money launderers from plundering the wealth of countries and funneling money around with impunity. We need tax systems where all pay what they owe, because when taxes aren't collected, it is the poor who suffer. And we need freer trade because when bureaucracy and trade barriers prevent people selling their goods for a fair price, nations are denied the chance to grow.

Since I put these issues on the international agenda at the G-8 summit in Lough Erne, Northern Ireland, last year, we have made significant progress. But there is an urgent need to do more.

For the [second time today](#) I agree with Cameron. But then note what the UK did when the issue of country-by-country reporting - endorsed for tax purposes at the G8 and which the EU wanted to extend to all multinational corporations in pursuit of that agenda of transparency that ensured tax was paid for the benefit of all. The UK blocked the move. [The UK Exchequer Secretary said in a Westminster debate on the issue:](#)

I will make three points. First, the UK believes that there is a need for greater transparency. There have been discussions about that issue in the G8, in particular

about the UK Government's proposal that companies should provide information about where their activity takes place and where they pay tax.....but the long-standing position of the UK Government-under all parties-is that tax is principally a matter for member states. We have concerns about a tax measure being included in a non-tax directive, thereby undermining the competency of member states in direct tax matters.

So for reasons of petty politics and parochialism the UK blocked an EU move on transparency that would have revealed where companies paid their tax and helped beat corruption.

I'm sorry David Cameron: the words are fine, but I want a commitment that is somewhat deeper than a flurry of rhetoric. I want to see a willingness to take action, and so far your government is falling way short on that. In fact, to not put too fine a point on it, you're blocking progress.