

2020 Albanian OSCE Chairmanship Conference
**“Good Governance and the Fight against Corruption in the
Digital Era: Strengthening the Principles of Transparency,
Integrity and Accountability”**

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Concluding Remarks

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Mr Chair, Distinguished Authorities, dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure and an honour, indeed, to address this audience today.

Before I begin my concluding remarks, allow me to thank the Albanian Chairmanship for your efforts in convening this conference despite the constraints we are all facing. A confirmation, if needed at all, of your commitment to promote international cooperation in combating corruption. I'd like also to commend the quick and effective response by the OSCE Chairmanship and the Secretariat in ensuring the continuity in the functions and activities of the Organization, both at headquarters and in the field.

One would say that it is not an easy task to condense into a few minutes yesterday and today's discussions, but I will try to take up the challenge and share my reflections with you.

The high-level opening panel reaffirmed the existence of a wide-ranging political will in the OSCE region to prevent and fight corruption more effectively, including through cooperation in investigating and prosecuting corruption-related crimes.

In the course of the subject-specific sessions, many topics were debated and promising recommendations were advanced for the future, common work of the OSCE. Government representatives of participating States, ODIHR, RFoM, international and regional organisations and initiatives, civil society and academia: all speakers contributed to the discussions by highlighting the need for more transparency, integrity and accountability in public administration and deeper trust among public and private actors.

I deem it important also to highlight the qualified contributions offered during the panels by the OSCE Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation. This demonstrated once again the political and practical value of our partnerships within the OSCE.

The first session was devoted to the concept of strengthening accountability, an issue of particular relevance at a time of exceptional and unpredictable circumstances, ones that are exerting enormous pressure and great strain on public governance systems. This predicament is giving rise to concerns as to the resilience of our public governance, in the face of risks of instability against the growing public demand for quick and efficient responses in terms of provision of services and public spending.

Indeed, preserving the sustainability of our governance structures stands out as a most urgent task for all our countries. However, while we should remain vigilant on the actual risks posed by the magnitude of the challenges ahead of us, we should also try and balance any such grim scenario of demise with a call to grasp the opportunity offered by the crisis to expedite the modernisation of our public governance systems, alongside a strong re-affirmation of their main pillars and tenets.

I believe that the same sense of urgency that governments are displaying to meet the demand for goods and services in times of crisis should provide agency to the objective of a new social contract

built on trust, solidarity and transparency, one where private citizens and the business communities are called upon to act as responsible stakeholders, ready to take on the responsibility of playing an active role in the enforcement of the principles of transparency and accountability.

I am referring to the need to leverage the severe constraints posed by the crisis to apply and extend measures of simplification of rules and procedures that appear as excessive, rigid or redundant, in a renewed effort to foster collective responsibility between citizens and government and a culture of integrity. That is, the new social compact I have mentioned before.

Efforts in pursuing this new social compact for good public governance, as a sustainable response to the urgent needs dictated by the COVID 19 crisis, do also require a renewed commitment to go further in the digital transformation of companies and governments, such as e-government tools (automation of internal processes) and digital public services (getting an ID, paying taxes). Governments will need to not only invest in those infrastructures but also to ensure that they can guarantee the protection of critical data. Transparency must

be the guiding principle of any government digital agenda to keep the trust of their citizens, as was remarked during the third session.

Over the last few years, and particularly during my mandate in the OSCE, I have encouraged a mature discussion on the multifaceted nature of technology, as a source both of challenges and opportunities. Indeed, digital tools and ICT can be used to foster democratic processes and increase transparency and citizens' political engagement, while anchoring integrity in the public sector.

As I have underlined previously, trust needs to be at the core of the relationship between the public, society and the business community. Lack of trust creates the conditions for a culture of over codification of anti-corruption/repressive measures, a development that runs counter to the very idea of the social compact. One needs to create a culture aimed at reinforcing the trust between public and private actors. Effective anti-corruption measures require a participatory approach among governments, civil society, the business community and the media to foster citizens' trust and social consensus on non-tolerance of corruption.

Access to information on legislation, transparency of budgets and procedures, public hearings on policy and legislation, and strong whistle-blower protection are necessary to enable citizens to take charge and contribute to improving good governance.

In this framework where a participatory approach drives the process of developing and consolidating public governance, prevention of corruption emerges as a pivotal action in designing a workable good governance protocol in statehood.

The involvement of civil society organisations, business communities and the media can indeed play an instrumental role, including through the support of OSCE field operations, especially in preventing corruption.

It should also not be forgotten how the role of corporate governance in the private sector has become increasingly important in recent years. Private self-regulation, moreover, has played an absolutely central role in spreading the culture of compliance, as an indispensable mechanism for the prevention of offences and wrongdoing within complex organisations. One can rightly reckon that the private sector has often been a harbinger of the dynamics of

public cooperation among states, a driver of de facto harmonisation of the rules at global level.

Last but not least, we should not forget the role that can be played by the young in combating corruption. Indeed, the young in every country can prove to be an effective voice against corruption. Key to youth engagement in anti-corruption efforts is education on the topic. Unbiased and innovative ideas to promote good governance, as cogitated and shaped within youth groups, can be a strong tool in the public efforts to reduce malpractices and increase transparency. In particular, the young in the OSCE area can:

- lead in promoting anti-corruption awareness, as they are best suited to deploy digitalisation tools that can be especially effective in generating the drive towards integrity and accountability among the young citizenry;
- lead by example of being honest and not susceptible to 'benefits';
- provide real-life examples of being politically aware and deploy consciousness in social engagements and public life.

In conclusion, this Conference has provided a sound platform for a timely exercise of stock-taking as international cooperation in combating corruption has been enduring the impact of COVID-19. As the main takeaway, I am glad to note that participants recognised that the international/multilateral dimension and support from regional and international organisations are still crucial and needed to continue building capacity at both inter and intra institutional level.

The OSCE must continue to stand united to call upon governments themselves to work hard to develop and enhance effective corruption-prevention policies and regulations, while maintaining its support for the latter's efforts. This is crucial for the creation of a climate of confidence that is essential to ensure positive economic development, especially in the time of global fragility in public health.

Thank you