

## **28th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum**

**“Promoting security, stability and economic growth in the OSCE area by preventing and combating corruption through innovation, increased transparency and digitalization”**

### **FIRST PREPARATORY MEETING**

**Vienna, 17-18 February 2020**

**Prof. Paola Severino**

- Distinguished Authorities, dear colleagues, it is a great pleasure and an honour, indeed, to address this audience today, conveying my concluding remarks at the end of a very successful conference.
- While apologising for having missed yesterday’s program due to a previously set engagement, I would like to thank the Albanian Chairmanship for co-hosting this event, thus confirming the sense of priority attached to the fight against corruption in the agenda of its Chairmanship, and acknowledging the added value that the OSCE can provide in this area within the more general domain of public governance. My gratitude goes also to Ambassador Zugic and all his colleagues at the OCEEA for their support and relentless spirit of cooperation, and for briefing me on the discussions that took place yesterday.

- Indeed, it is not an easy task to try and condense into a few minutes the active discussions and relevant contributions that have punctuated the unfolding of the conference, but I will try to meet that challenge, sharing with you my reflections.
- Allow me to start by mentioning that just a week ago, I was in Skopje for a very successful OSCE regional conference on the fight against corruption, which attracted over 70 participants from the whole of South East Europe. What clearly emerged from the rich presentations and good discussions there was a growing awareness of both the pernicious nature of the threat posed by corruption and the complexity of any strategy to counter this threat, calling for an innovative approach.
- Innovation in combating corruption, in my view, has four pillars:
  - 1) **Balancing the narrative of anti-corruption policies, championing prevention and incentives alongside the “traditional” primacy of repressive approaches.** Repression is certainly critical, although shifting from an approach focusing exclusively on the punitive/criminal side of the fight against corruption to an approach where the intellectual efforts are equally aimed at prevention and enforcement allows us to enrich the narrative and make any anti-corruption strategy more effective and sustainable.

2) **Promoting a mature discussion on the multifaceted nature of technology, as a source both of challenges and opportunities.**

Indeed, on the one hand, digital tools and ICT can be used to foster democratic processes and increase transparency and citizens' political engagement. Many among our States – as it has been stressed in more than one speech during this conference – have already started exploring the opportunities offered by ICT to make use of e-solutions with a view to developing more transparent, accountable and corruption-free processes.

On the other hand, the rapid pace of technological development gives rise to significant challenges for both the public and private sector. The low level of regulation which still characterises new digital tools makes their use particularly attractive for criminals as they can be easily exploited to steal personal data, channel illicit funds or commit other cybercrimes that put the security of our citizens at great risk.

3) **Recognising the importance of the international/multilateral dimension to pursue convergence in normative and regulatory frameworks as well as to build capacity at both inter and intra institutional level.**

International public governance should foster the approximation of national laws on prevention and repression in the fight against corruption and all forms of wrongdoing in the public and private

sectors. Indeed, today there is a need for greater uniformity in the regulation of the business sector, which is essential for the creation of a common level playing field for all actors.

In the absence of such international harmonisation of rules, in fact, the commitment of a single system to set up an effective regulatory anti-corruption apparatus risks generating the adverse counter-effect of diverting the investments of companies, which might prefer to allocate their resources elsewhere.

**4) Fostering participatory approaches, by factoring in and supporting the role that civil society, business communities and the media can play as “monitors and advisers” in the formulation and implementation of anti-corruption policies.**

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. Allowing civil society to take part in decision-making and the monitoring of projects can have a significant impact in the enhancement of the standards of transparency and fairness in public administration. Moreover, an established and active civil society does provide solid ground from which experts, activists and reporters can safely engage the

authorities in their advocacy for high standards of transparency, fairness and integrity in the domain of public governance.

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. A key concept today, also for private international governance, is that of risk management through organisational means. This is a guiding principle that has central importance especially in relation to the prevention of crime within an organisation. In this sense it can be said that the private sector has often been a harbinger of the same traditional public cooperation among states. In fact, large international groups often adopt risk management systems that are completely uniform for the group companies operating in countries with radically different legislation, and this, clearly, represents a fundamental vehicle for the de facto harmonisation of the rules at global level.

- In all of the areas that I mentioned just now the OSCE is already playing a role through a number of important extra-budgetary activities implemented by the OCEEA and field operations. Some of the participating States are beneficiaries of these projects presented during the last two days, and that shows the trust they place in our

Organization. Let me take this opportunity to praise the professionalism of the OCEEA staff and those participating States contributing to the success of these projects.

- I have taken note with great interest of the contributions of the speakers during the four sessions.
- In particular, as regards Session I, I am glad to echo the need to factor in the digital dimension in the development of innovative anti-corruption strategies, as well those commending the role of the OSCE as a platform for enhancing international cooperation and facilitating the negotiation of international or regional/sub-regional regulatory frameworks.
- In Session II it was highlighted that the rapid pace of technological innovation can have a strong impact on public governance and on the prevention of corruption and maladministration and can pose new challenges to both the law enforcement and the regulatory processes at national and international level.
- In Session III the issues of transparency and participatory approaches were raised, acknowledging the need for regional cooperation and the importance of offering incentives and reinforcing the narrative that links anti-corruption efforts to the objective of enhancing economic growth, to the benefit of society as a whole.
- Interestingly, the narrative of the fight against corruption as a crucial tool to advocate and protect “public goods” was returned to also this

morning during Session IV, where we heard about the strong links between the quest for transparency and integrity in public and private governance and the prevention of environmental risks.

Before concluding let me recall the four recommendations that the Secretary General offered us as food-for-thought in view of our further efforts to prevent and combat corruption:

- We should continue to make a strong effort to identify openings for closer partnership with other international and regional organisations, civil society, businesses and academia.
- We should also make sure that we are sensitive to how technological innovation in this field might affect equality issues between men and women.
- The more systematic inclusion of young people in our discussions and programming can help us cover a wider range of opinions and opportunity.
- Finally, greater awareness of how we contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda, in particular in relation to Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions can help us identify synergies with other stakeholders and leverage our respective strengths.

I believe that these suggestions could represent a solid road map for our deliberations this year as well as for the further activities that the OSCE

can implement in supporting the participating States in meeting their anti-corruption commitments.

Distinguished Authorities, dear colleagues, before handing the floor back to Ambassador Zugic for his final remarks, I would like to share with you what I consider to be my main inspiration and guide ever since I took up for the first time the mandate of Special Representative during the Italian Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2018: fighting corruption remains a mission for the long haul. In order to succeed patience, perseverance and vision are needed. I remain confident that the OSCE can lend an important contribution to this end. I feel privileged and honoured to enjoy the opportunity to be part of this contribution.

Thank you