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Corruption
Second preparatory meeting, 28th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum
15-16 June 2020

Mr Chair, Distinguished Authorities, dear colleagues, It is a great pleasure and an honor, indeed, to address this audience today.

First of all, allow me to thank the Albanian Chairmanship for your efforts in convening this session despite the constraints we are all facing. 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 Organisation, both at the Headquarters and in the field.

Our Countries are being confronted with a challenge of unprecedented nature and magnitude, whose disruptive impact on all dimensions of our societies requires a response based on an increasing international cooperation. I do believe that the OSCE with its comprehensive approach to security can provide a sound platform for facilitating dialogue, sharing practices and supporting co-operation to reinforce the resilience of our Countries and societies.

The need to address with the utmost sense of urgency the unprecedented challenges entailed by the pandemic has been exerting a huge pressure and much strain on the public governance systems, raising worries on its resilience in the face of public demand for quick and efficient responses in terms of provision of services and public spending.

Preserving the Sustainability of our governance structures stands out as a most urgent task for all our Countries. Indeed, the fight against corruption must remain a priority within the OSCE, and I am particularly glad to offer my experience and commitment to the Albanian Chairmanship, who has given high priority to the fight against corruption in its agenda.

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 take up, instead, the opportunity offered by the crisis to expedite the modernization of our public governance systems, alongside a strong re-affirmation of their main pillars and tenets.

Our discussion today will touch upon issues such as the role of innovation, transparency and digitalization, all extremely relevant in the fight against corruption. The OSCE does play a crucial role in addressing those issues, though a renewed commitment should be expressed toward a more systematic inclusion of youth, who can provide the most effective backbone in mitigating the risks posed by the pandemic.

Inclusion of the young generations in our activities by supporting mechanisms to raise their awareness of organised crime and corruption ensures sustainability of our work.

I am very pleased that the OSCE' Albanian Chairmanship has been a great promoter of the systematic inclusion of youth in all set priority areas. I am myself a great supporter of youth, a commitment that I put in practice on a daily basis in my other capacity as Vice President of LUISS University.

Fostering youth's understanding and awareness on the true dangers and impacts of organized crime and corruption across the OSCE region, should represent a strategic priority, as it ensures a holistic and sustainable approach. I believe that enhancing the education and raising awareness of next generations on the fundamental role of the rule of law and good governance, particularly now when these tenets of democracy might be questioned in the face of urgent needs ensuing from the crisis - will lead to the long expected attitudinal change, needed for effectively counteracting to this crime.

This is not breaking news. The strategic value of this topic was often stressed in OSCE documents. Indeed, the OSCE participating States have acknowledged in 2014 that “youth and children require particular attention and that their needs, concerns and interests should be addressed in a comprehensive manner”. They have also recognized in 2018 “the role that [youth] can play in supporting participating States in the implementation of commitments in all three dimensions”. Moreover, in the absence of an OSCE-wide official policy on youth, adopted by participating States, the development of the Secretary General’s Framework for Strengthening OSCE Efforts on Youth and Security has been a solid anchor and reference.

I believe that in order to fully implement its commitments on Youth and Security, the OSCE might need to intensify its efforts to include youth perspectives in all dimensions. More concentrated and more continuous efforts are needed to really have an impact on the lives of our young people. The integration of youth perspectives - also in combating corruption - contributes to comprehensive security.

Earlier in my speech, I have mentioned the opportunity offered by the current crisis to expedite the modernization of the public governance structures and regulations, while reaffirming strongly the principles upon which the same structures and rules are based. Such comprehensive approach is integral to the initiatives of the OSCE in the domain of the fight against corruption. I would like then to briefly provide an update on them.

I will start with **the flagship project of the OSCE in preventing and combating corruption**, namely the **extra-budgetary project on “Strengthening anti-corruption reform in Armenia”**.

As some of you may remember, upon the invitation of the Government of Armenia, in June 2018 I conducted bilateral meetings with the Prime Minister,

the Minister of Justice and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia. As a follow-up of the visit, the Ministry of Justice of Armenia produced the official request indicating specific and concrete areas of required assistance, which served as a basis for the OCEEA-developed project on “Strengthening anti-corruption reform in Armenia” worth 2.4 million EUR, currently funded partially by Italy and Germany.

The project aims to assist the Ministry of Justice of Armenia in finalizing the National Strategy to Combat Corruption in Armenia in 2019-2022 and institutionalizing the national anti-corruption reform.

The OSCE retained international experts visited Yerevan twice in 2019 and have established direct working relationships with the Ministry of Justice of Armenia, as well as with other key government agencies, including the Office of the Prime Minister. Moreover, the OSCE has established strong working relationships with the EU Office and the UNDP Office in Armenia. As to the latter, I am particularly happy to recall the signature, a few days ago, of a Statement of Intent between the OSCE and the UNDP on strengthening the anti-corruption framework of the Republic of Armenia, a significant step toward the widening of the international support to the project and its objectives, a crucial development also for ensuring its financial sustainability.

As a result of the OSCE support, in October 2019, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Armenia adopted a National Anti- Corruption Strategy for 2019 -2022 and its Action Plan. Moreover, following the recommendations of the OSCE experts, the Government of Armenia established the Corruption Prevention Commission (a government agency) in November 2019.

I’m also very pleased to announce that the Government of Armenia officially recognized the OSCE as a leading organization to provide support in the institutionalization of anti-corruption reform in Armenia.

In the fight against corruption, adherence to the principles of integrity, transparency, and good economic governance should be pursued at all levels of public administration, including municipal governance.

That is why in 2019 the OSCE assumed the implementation of its extra-budgetary project on “Strengthening local government integrity in Ukraine”. The project was developed as a follow-up to my visit to Ukraine in September 2018, where I conducted bilateral talks with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Prosecutor General, the Director of National Anti-Corruption Bureau, and the Minister of Interior and other high-ranked officials. The project, funded by Italy and the United States, is aimed at assisting selected Municipal Administrations in Ukraine in improving the quality of municipal governance through capacity-building activities and experts’ support.

In November 2019 I met the mayors of participating municipalities and municipal officials responsible for integrity and corruption prevention in Rome during their assessment visit to Italy and delivered a lecture on key principles of good governance and corruption prevention. The lecture was followed by thematic training components and workshops at LUISS University and the Municipality of Rome.

I am pleased to report that two out of three municipalities, participating in the project, were ranked among the top three most transparent cities in Ukraine in 2019 according to Transparency International Ukraine.

As I remarked at the beginning of my speech, in our efforts to address effectively the current crisis, international cooperation is of the essence. In the area of the fight against corruption and transnational crime, the OSCE has promoted in South East Europe a multi-year project on “Strengthening the Fight against Transnational Organized Crime in South East Europe through Improved Regional Cooperation in Asset Seizure, Confiscation, Management and Re-use”. Through this initiative - worth over 2.4 million EUR, and currently

funded by USA, Italy and Germany and implemented jointly with TNDT - the OSCE aims to enhance the effectiveness of the fight against transnational organized crime in the OSCE region by improving regional cooperation among five participating States (pS) in South East Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia). The project adopts a holistic approach by providing support to the entire cycle of asset seizure and asset confiscation. As the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 crises do and will have an impact on the extent and quality of cooperation, it is important that the OSCE Participating States enhance their support so that the established network could maintain its full operationalization even in the current pandemic scenario.

Finally, OSCE attaches great importance to Promoting Good Governance and Enhancing Anti-Corruption Efforts through the Use of Open Data and New Digital Technologies.

In this regard, allow me to recall that in 2019 the OCEEA launched a new project that aims to increase the capacity of OSCE participating States to prevent and combat corruption, by strengthening transparency and improving public sector integrity and accountability of national and municipal authorities through the use of open data and digital technologies. Through close collaboration with the Open Government Partnership (OGP), OECD and other international organizations working on open data/open government initiatives, OSCE/OCEEA works to build the capacity and expertise of OSCE pS on the use of innovative open data tools and new digital technologies that can enable governments and civil society to implement open data national commitments. The initial phase of the project has focused on the presentation of best practices, on the use of new digital tools to monitor and analyse open data, and gaps in OSCE Participating States in this area that can be addressed in future activities. Future activities envision the creation of OSCE expert networks in

specific areas of open data and anti-corruption, while at the moment special attention is paid to emergency procurement procedures and other relevant areas, to help governments and communities in responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

More in general, in the area of digitalisation, national and international efforts in pursuing a sustainable response to the urgent needs dictated by the COVID 19 crisis, do require also 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 ensure 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 you may recall, during my mandate in the OSCE, I have promoted a mature discussion on the multifaceted nature of technology, as a source both of challenges and opportunities.

If there is one certainty emerging from the haze of the fight against COVID 19 is the urgent need to accelerate the digital transformation of our public governance systems. We should not miss this opportunity, to be pursued through inclusive engagement, ICT innovation and a stronger call for international and multilateral cooperation.

I wish you all fruitful discussion and exchanges during today's program. Thank you.