

IACC Panel
‘Corruption, Fragility and Conflict’

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- It is my pleasure and a privilege to be here.
- There is a close correlation between the quality of governance and the risk of conflict. The link between fragility and conflict has been highlighted on several occasions. Special attention needs to be devoted to the role played by corruption in this respect. As the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, said in his remarks before the Security Council at the session on “Corruption in Conflict” last September, “Corruption rots institutions; deprives people of their rights; breeds disillusion with

government and governance. Corruption can be a trigger for conflict. As conflict rages, corruption prospers”.

- Democracies don't wage war against each other. That is certainly true – with occasional exceptions. It's even more true for well-governed countries. These are much more likely to focus on producing butter than firing guns.
- On the contrary, poor governance raises the risk of conflict. In particular, corruption: a multifaceted phenomenon, as well as a global phenomenon, which has at least as many negative effects, and certainly increases the risk of conflict.
- Corruption pollutes the social contract, by altering the playing field and distorting the allocation of resources. It erodes the confidence of citizens, by undermining the

legitimacy of public institutions and sapping the efficiency of state apparatuses. By sowing the seeds of fragility, by impairing governance and weakening support for the rule of law, corruption creates conditions which may be conducive to instability and conflict.

- The increasing number of fragile states poses a real security concern.
- This link has often been analysed outside of Europe, in particular, on the African continent. This correlation is also very relevant for Europe, as I have experienced during my term as Special Representative of the Italian Presidency of the OSCE.
- Let's take Bosnia, as a first example. As you know, this was the theatre of one of the most tragic conflicts on European soil just a few decades ago. In Bosnia,

corruption is one of the most dramatic challenges that the population and its elected representatives are facing.

- Still, corruption was a challenge to Bosnia-Herzegovina's stability even before the conflict. As a few Bosnian representatives like to say, inter-ethnic tensions were never a real issue in Bosnia. Corruption was, and the murderous, tragic war which cost so many innocent lives represented a convenient distraction.
- I would also like to mention Armenia. The link between corruption and security is even more evident in the case of Armenia. We know that a peaceful revolution forced a change at the very top of the government, just a few months ago. And that a top priority for the new government in Yerevan is to eradicate corruption from the country by promoting a culture of transparency and respect for the rule of law. This is a true cultural

revolution in many respects, which the international community has a vital interest in making sure that it will succeed.

- When I was in Yerevan, around the end of last July, I discovered that there was one more side to corruption, which touched directly on the security of the country. Some of my interlocutors, in fact, pointed out that the corrupt nature of the previous regime had played a significant role in the long-standing conflict between Armenia and its neighbour, Azerbaijan, over Nagorno-Karabakh.
- Last but not least, I wish to raise the example of Ukraine. A country where the corrupt practices of the previous regime were behind that regime's rejection of the Association Agreement proposed by the European Union. That rejection had triggered both the strong

popular protest contributing to the regime's downfall, and Russia's subsequent reaction which has led to the current state of confrontation between the two countries. And in Ukraine, like in Armenia, combating corruption is among the first priorities on the agenda of the current government.

- Corruption is both a cause and an effect of conflict. Corruption can be before, and behind, a conflict. It creates, or contributes to create, the conditions which may eventually lead to a conflict. And it is an effect of a conflict: the conditions of fragility and lawlessness which are typical of many post-conflict situations are equally conducive to corruption.
- This is a vicious circle in which links with organised crime, and terrorism, also need to be considered. In fact, when the State is weak and unable to assert its power,

other organisations fill the vacuum. As corruption is a crime and a nefarious one at that, criminal organisations are best placed to take over. And when the State is fragile and the law is absent, terrorist organisations can also develop – as we have seen in many situations.

- What lessons did I draw from my experiences?
 - First: fighting corruption is a long-term endeavour. It requires vision, determination and patience.
 - Second: there is no magic formula, no one-size-fits-all solution. Answers to this challenge are necessarily context-specific. What worked successfully in one country may not necessarily work in a different country, or at a different historical juncture.
 - Third: local ownership – ownership of anti-corruption efforts by local institutions and by local societies – is key. Solutions imposed from the outside

or from above may work in the short run but they are much more likely to be ineffective, or even counterproductive, over a longer period of time.

- Fourth: a step-by-step approach is the best recipe for sustainable success. As Rome was not built in a day, a conflict cannot be resolved overnight – the same applies to the fight against corruption. These are two sides of the same coin. Pragmatism alone does not suffice but pragmatism would certainly help.
- Fifth: complex challenges call for complex, sophisticated answers. Like for the SDGs, a whole-of-government approach is needed to overcome bureaucratic divisions and rivalries. A concerted effort at international level is also needed, because if conflicts, fragilities and corruption have local roots,

their consequences tend to ignore national boundaries.

I also wish to emphasise that the OSCE can provide an important added value in this respect. Everyone knows the essential contribution that the OSCE has brought to peace and security in Europe. The Helsinki conference in 1975 was a landmark initiative to overcome the divisions and bring down the walls of the Cold War. The spirit of Helsinki, of an open and frank dialogue among equals, as well as the holistic vision of security which the OSCE advocates, and which includes striving for good governance and combating corruption, are equally important to address the difficult and interconnected challenges of the twenty-first century.

- Sixth: the mobilisation and active participation of society is another essential precondition. Involving public opinion in our strategies against corruption, fostering a constant debate among citizens, raising awareness and promoting a culture of lawfulness in schools of all levels as well as at universities, can play a powerful role. These actions are also instrumental in preventing conflict and in fostering social cohesion, which is a key ingredient of any post-conflict strategy. In pursuing these objectives, new technologies can be of great help. We must not forget, however, that at the same time, technological advances also raise delicate problems of governance.
- Seventh, and final lesson: the role of women in combating corruption, as well as in advancing peace and security, has been mentioned – notably in studies

published by the World Bank. This is additional evidence of the interlinkages between these two challenges and of the key role women can play in addressing them both.