

*Implementation of the Corruption Prevention Mechanisms  
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Distinguished Authorities, dear Ambassadors, excellencies, good morning.

It is a great pleasure for me to be with you today.

I am really honoured to be here in Belgrade today – as a representative of the OSCE and as a representative of the Italian presidency. Serbia is among the most important participating States of the Organization and is historically very close to Italy. I am very pleased to see how well both the OSCE and Italy are represented here!

I am particularly pleased to attend this conference in my capacity as Special Representative on Combating Corruption. I know you have already had a very intense and fruitful discussion, which will continue today.

As I was saying yesterday in Vienna, where I spoke before the Permanent Council of the OSCE, the fight against corruption features very high in the agenda of the Organization. Important policy documents recognise the great importance of effective action in this respect – most prominent amongst them, the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on the Prevention of Corruption, adopted in 2014 in Basel.

As our participating States recognised back then, corruption at all levels is a potential source of political tension that undermines stability and security, and facilitates criminal activity. It is a phenomenon that changes features from time to time, and country to country, and at the same time does not stop at national borders. International cooperation is indispensable to combat corruption effectively, and the role that the OSCE can play in this respect is particularly valuable.

Therefore, international cooperation on anti-corruption has been of paramount interest to the Italian Chairmanship of the OSCE. The very fact that the Italian Chair decided to appoint the first Special

Representative in the history of OSCE with a specific mandate in this respect is evidence of this.

In spite of the best efforts to date, including cooperation at international level, important work remains to be done. Corruption remains widespread and continues to pose a serious challenge to the OSCE's shared values. This is true not only in the Western Balkans but also beyond this region, including in countries where one hears little about the challenge posed by corruption – paradoxically, sometimes the less one hears about that challenge, the more serious the challenge itself is!

In my speeches I have often been stressing some points that in my view are particularly important. I will reaffirm them here too: the importance of combining tools of repression with effective prevention; the key element of the effective mobilisation of civil society, with a very prominent role to be played by the private sector; the need to put in place clever communication strategies, stressing the value of anti-corruption as a moral imperative and at the same time as economically worthwhile.

I wish to underline in particular two more points: the importance of regional cooperation and of effective implementation mechanisms.

International cooperation, as I said before, is of the essence. The challenge posed by corruption changes from country to country but at the same time transcends national boundaries. An effective anti-corruption strategy must take into due account local distinctive features and maximise the opportunities offered by cooperation between national governments and international organisations. Regional cooperation has a key role to play as it is ideally placed to link the international with the local dimension.

In this respect, and as far as the Western Balkans' region is concerned, Serbia can play a leading role. As one of the most important countries in the region and a country whose engagement in the fight against corruption is highlighted by its anti-corruption authority – a commendable example which has been followed by other neighbours as well.

Regional cooperation in this field, therefore, means first and foremost cooperation among anti-corruption authorities. It is crucial that the anti-corruption bodies' cooperation is not limited to the transfer of best practices and knowledge, but also opens up possibilities of exchange of data, such as on disclosure of assets and financial interests. In this context, I would like to recall the Decision of the 2017 Western Balkans Summit in Trieste, where leaders endorsed an initiative in this regard.

The importance of implementation also deserves a special mention. In my missions in the OSCE area, I have seen how implementation is a critical element of anti-corruption strategies. In several countries, bold initiatives and grand plans to fight corruption abound; what is still missing is credible implementation, notably effective mechanisms to make sure that the announced measures are followed and backed up by concrete, tangible measures.

I am particularly pleased to stress the importance of implementation while being in Belgrade, where important developments in the field of prevention of corruption are taking

place. I have been informed about the recent adoption of the Law on Lobbying and I wish the Serbian authorities every success in the implementation of these imperative regulations, hoping that they will provide a positive impulse for stories of success in the Western Balkans and beyond.

The involvement of the media and civil society can also play an instrumental role, including through the support of OSCE field operations present in this region, especially in preventing corruption. The ability of an independent media to investigate and to publish the results of any investigations, without fear of prosecution or physical harm, is an essential tool in preventing and combating corruption at all levels and in all sectors. It is a true asset which has to be preserved.

Discussions related to corruption risk assessment and financing political activities are ahead of you today. Implementation of both of these preventive measures has to be comprehensively re-considered, to take due account of loopholes and shortcomings. Corruption risk assessment, both sector-wise and institutionally,

can certainly provide a more meaningful impact, while controls over the financing of political activities need to be further strengthened and more effectively implemented.

Finally, I am convinced that events of this kind can be of great help, as they strengthen our common efforts in preventing corruption.

I wish you fruitful discussions and constructive deliberations.

Thank you very much!