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Key Note Speech

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**2nd ODIHR/TI
BOOT CAMP ON POLITICAL INTEGRITY: PREVENTING
POLITICAL CORRUPTION AND INCREASING
TRANSPARENCY IN AN ONLINE WORLD**

Deputy Head of ODIHR Democratization Department, Distinguished participants, dear colleagues, It is with great pleasure and honor, indeed, that I am going to address this audience today.

As some of you may recall, since the begin and all the way through my highly rewarding experience as Special Representative for the fight against corruption - under Italian, Slovakian and Albanian Chairmanships – I have been a staunch supporter of the OSCE and of its approach to security as conducive to enhancing the international cooperation in the fight against corruption. Initiatives of active sharing of understanding and good practices as the one we are attending today are a clear example of how effective can be the “OSCE method” in generating synergies and mutual efforts while

promoting open discussion and sense of ownership at all levels, public and private.

The leading issue of this second Boot Camp is preventing political corruption and increasing transparency in an online world. While I look forward to hearing the different experiences as shared by the Transparency International Chapters, I would like to highlight the increasing sense of priority that has been accompanying the discussions on corruption within the OSCE. Most vividly, such quest for prioritization has been duly embraced by the Albanian Chairmanship, who has made it the primary topic of its agenda in the Economic and Environmental Dimension of the OSCE. Besides the annual OSCE Conference on the fight against corruption – which took place on 6-7 July – also the Concluding Meeting of the 28th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum in Prague was devoted to the same topic, under the banner of “Promoting security, stability and economic growth in the OSCE area by preventing and combating corruption through innovation, increased transparency and digitalization”.

The strengthening of the commitment of the OSCE Participating States toward combating corruption goes hand in hand with the growing awareness

and understanding of this threat and of its far-reaching and ruinous implications.

Indeed, corruption is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. It is a challenge which can undermine the security of both citizens and States, as well as the relations between States; it is the cause of serious malfunctioning of governments and institutions, striking at the very heart of the social compact; it is a distortion of the level playing field which prevents the optimal allocation of resources between producers and consumers, sapping legality, predictability and confidence. Such a bleak, but realistic scenario, becomes all the more worrisome if it factors in the severe damage to public trust that can ensue from political corruption.

And public trust remains the Governments' main ally in ensuring the resilience of our society in the face of the current pandemic.

Allow me to take this opportunity to elaborate further on the issue of the resilience of our Countries and of the increasing challenges that the COVID 19 pandemic poses to our common commitment to fight corruption.

The debate on the impact of the COVID-19 on public governance over the last few months has been often driven by voices depicting bleak scenarios

of criminal appetites set to be fed by the the extraordinary financial resources that are being allocated within the scope of national and international relief efforts. 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 counter such risks by expediting the modernization of our public governance systems.

The exceptional circumstances should also provide agency to the objective of a new social contract built on trust, solidarity and transparency, one where the private citizens, the civil society and the business communities be called to act as responsible stake-holders, ready to take on the responsibility of being an active part in the enforcement of the principles of transparency and accountability.

I am referring to the need of leveraging on 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.

I am also referring to a renewed commitment to go further in the digital transformation of companies and governments. 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.

Over the last few years, and particularly within 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. 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 and in the political ecosystem.

Distinguished participants, in our efforts to address effectively the need to actively pursue our fight against corruption against the backdrop of the current crisis, international cooperation is, more than ever, of the essence.

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 increase the capacity of OSCE participating States to prevent and combat corruption.

As I am sure it will emerge during the following sessions, corruption, also in its political ramifications, is a phenomenon which changes features from country to country and at the same time doesn't stop at national borders: "one size fits all" responses are therefore ineffective. Such a complicated,

elusive and ever-changing challenge requires a comprehensive, joined-up response, calling for energies, efforts to be mobilized, and to be put together at all possible levels. Only concerted actions by governments and between governments and international organizations - with the aim at pursuing both operational synergies and, most importantly, processes of regulatory harmonization - can ensure that those efforts are successful.

This is the approach that I feel is mandatory for me to promote and that has informed my work ever since I have taken on the responsibility of Special Representative: focusing on the ownership of the countries concerned, respecting local peculiarities and sensitivities; mobilizing the awareness and support from civil society; engaging and ensuring the association of the private sector.

I do consider the Boot Camp as a trustworthy and resourceful ally in my mission as OSCE Special Representative, and I thank you once again for having offered me the opportunity to address such a stimulating audience today.