

**18th WINTER MEETING
OF THE OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

Discussion sessions:

General Committee on Political Affairs and Security (Neuer Saal, 2nd floor)

Friday, 22 February 2019

Keynote Speech Prof. Paola Severino

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Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the organizers of this year Winter Meeting, and particularly to the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. George Tsereteli, and the Secretary General, Mr. Roberto Montella. I would also like to thank the representatives of the OSCE participating States for the appreciation shown for the work I have so far carried out in my capacity as Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson in Office on combating corruption.

As this is my first appearance since the establishment of the new Chairmanship, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the OSCE Chairperson in Office, H.E. Minister Miroslav Lajčák for giving me the opportunity to continue such important mandate also throughout 2019.

Distinguished Colleagues,

the Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly offers a remarkable platform for parliamentarians to share best practices on a wide range of pivotal issues - including corruption - not only among themselves, but also with representatives of the participating States as well as OSCE officials.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has been continuously and profoundly engaged in tackling this heinous crime. Among its latest accomplishments, I consider the Resolution on *Acting against Corruption in the OSCE Region to strengthen the Rule of Law* adopted in 2016 as a great contribution to the international fight against corruption. Effective anti-corruption national legislations represent the most basic and essential requirement for efficient corruption prevention policies. At the same time, corruption is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that requires global solution and concerted efforts. 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. It 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; international cooperation is indispensable. Such a complicated, elusive and ever-changing challenge requires a comprehensive, joined-up response, calling for energies, efforts to be mobilised, and to be put together at all possible levels. Cooperation and mobilization are key; only concerted actions by governments and between governments and international organisations can ensure that those efforts are successful.

In this regard, I firmly believe that strengthening mutual efforts against corruption by also identifying ways to promote my collaboration with the Parliamentary Assembly and all other OSCE actors involved on this thematic would be essential to effectively tackle this problem across the OSCE Area.

Distinguished Parliamentarians,
as rightly underlined by the Chairperson in Office, H.E. Miroslav Lajčák during his opening speech, we should join efforts and make sure that the Organization is able to

cope with not only present, but also future challenges to our common stability and security. This is particularly timely and needed when considering the impact of the increased use of digital tools and innovations in our lives.

The rapid digitalization process taking place across the OSCE area is generating substantial changes in all spheres of life and brings with it a range of profound security implications, including many in the area of good-governance and anti-corruption. Even in the digital era, corruption remains one of the major challenges affecting the OSCE area, as well as a major threat to democracy, human rights, rule of law and, last but not least, economic development.

On the one hand, digital tools and ICT can be used to foster democratic processes and increase citizens' political engagement. Many among our States have already started exploring the opportunities offered by ICTs to make use of e-solutions with a view to develop 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 characterizes 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 which put at high risk the security of our citizens.

As many of you know, these topics are not new to the OSCE. Throughout last year, I have supported the Italian 2018 OSCE Chairmanship in its efforts to tackle corruption and promote good governance in the digital era. Thanks to the numerous official visits that I have conducted across the Region, I noticed the interest of local stakeholders to be supported by the OSCE in their national fight against corruption, also by taking advantage of the opportunities offered by digital tools in this area. These aspects were also the focus of the high-level Anti-Corruption Conference which took place on 12-13 November 2018 in Rome. Participants discussed contemporary topics in the field of

combating corruption, also with reference to the active and key role that parliamentarians play in keeping this issue high on their national legislative agenda. In this regard, a series of recommendations were issued and I hope you will find them useful when bringing the topic of good governance and corruption at the attention of your national parliaments.

Dear Colleagues,

It is clear that the digital transformation has dramatically raised citizens' demand for transparent administrations and consequently for the concrete empowerment of their respective control instruments to ensure the good functioning of democracy.

Corruption directly and primarily affects the well-functioning of democratic institutions, ultimately depriving our citizens to fairly access even the most basic services.

Parliamentarians, being elected by citizens, should be accountable to them and make sure that their mandates are actually promoting a corruption free environment.

In the light of the many external threats that democracy is facing in modern societies, making democratic institutions more transparent and resilient to corruption is ever more necessary to ensuring their capability to fight external threats.

I have always promoted an integrated approach as the only way forward to tackling corruption. This means that the laws should be focused on not only repressive measures but also preventive ones. In practice, regulatory goals of public authorities should be focused on creating working mechanisms capable of enabling those authorities to identify and quickly eradicate any actual or potential conflicts of interest as well as any situation that may pave the way for illegal agreements or any other misconduct whatsoever.

Only by guaranteeing a higher standard in terms of good governance, transparency and rule of law, we will maximize the integrity of public authorities and therefore foster the active participation of civil society into social and economic development processes.

Furthermore, we shall work together to build and foster a new culture of integrity and legality using a multi-stakeholder and inclusive approach. In other words, an ambitious and innovative fight against corruption has to rely on a wide ranging and multilayered debate involving governmental entities, civil society, business community and academia. In particular, I wish to mention the role of corporate governance in the private sector. In recent years, private companies have performed a commendable task in the transnational dissemination of best practices. Private self-regulation, moreover, has played a central role in spreading the culture of compliance, as an indispensable mechanism for the prevention of illicit phenomena within complex organizations.

In this regard, multilateral and international initiatives like the Open Government Partnership – which aims at promoting greater collaboration between governments, citizens and the civil society by taking advantage of digital platforms – are noteworthy. Indeed, technologies can represent an opportunity for democracy and anti-corruption but only if we transform them in an opportunity to empower citizens and include them in our decision-making processes at all levels.

When talking about multilateral efforts, I believe that both Ministerial Documents adopted at the last Ministerial Council in Milan in the framework of the Economic and Environmental Dimension represent a step forward also in the fight against corruption. Indeed the documents recognize the pivotal role that technologies can play to increase transparency and accountability underlining the role that national Parliaments shall play to make this possible. By updating the national legislations, parliamentarians

possess the suitable means needed to eradicate those dynamics which are at the basis of the corruption phenomena.

I also wish to emphasise that the OSCE can provide an important added value in this respect. As I have explained, corruption is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon with wide-ranging repercussions, including on security. The OSCE has always advocated a holistic approach to security and in this vision an effective fight against corruption plays a critical role. For the reasons I have outlined before, combating corruption calls for a participatory, multi-stakeholder approach, based on constructive cooperation among equals, mutually beneficial comparison and exchanges of experiences and best practices. The OSCE is uniquely placed to perform these functions in support of its participating States and in cooperation with other international organisations.

In conclusion, in my capacity as Special Representative of the Slovak Chairperson in Office on combating corruption, I wish to recall that I am here to support participating States as well as OSCE Structures and Institutions to build upon what we have already achieved while looking at further common efforts in light of the Ministerial Conference in Bratislava and the Annual Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

In this regard, I would also like to thank the Coordinator for OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Ambassador Vuk Zugic, and his valuable team for all their support and assistance.

Distinguished Delegates, Parliamentarians, and Colleagues,

I thank you very much for your attention and look forward to a fruitful collaboration throughout 2019.