

**Prof. Paola Severino**  
**Key Note Speech**  
***28th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum***  
***CONCLUDING MEETING***  
**10-11 September 2020**

Mr Chair, Distinguished Authorities, dear colleagues, It is with great pleasure and honor, indeed, that I am going to address this audience today. Allow me first to thank the Albanian Chairmanship for the valuable efforts in convening this session despite the constraints we are all facing. And allow me to warmly thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic for organizing and hosting, in such a difficult period, this prestigious meeting. I would also like to warmly greet Deputy Minister Marina Sereni, who has received by the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs the important mandate for the relationship with the OSCE. This significant acknowledgment testifies the importance of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe for us all.

The high level of participation in this opening session as well as in the panels that will enliven the three working sessions are a clear testimony both to the commitment of the Albanian Chairmanship and of the importance that the OSCE Participating States attach to the driving theme of this year's Forum, that is the contribution that the fight against corruption can provide to promoting security, stability and economic growth.

As I have stated already on the occasion of the second preparatory meeting last 15-16th June, our Countries are being confronted with a challenge of

unprecedented nature and magnitude, a game-changer whose disruptive impact on all dimensions of our societies requires, more than ever, a response based on an increasing international cooperation.

Our discussion today will touch upon issues - such as the role of innovation, transparency and digitalization in the fight against corruption - all extremely relevant in the quest for the modernization of public governance systems as the most effective strategy to ensure their resilience in the face of the COVID-19 crisis.

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 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 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.

As I remarked at the beginning of my speech, in our efforts to address effectively the current crisis, international cooperation is 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. Strengthening transparency and improving public sector integrity and accountability of national and municipal authorities through the use of digital technologies are areas eligible for further efforts by the OSCE, in close cooperation with the Open Government Partnership (OGP), OECD and other international organizations working on open government initiatives.

Ladies and gentleman, before bringing my speech to an end, I would like to stress how a strategy of innovation and modernization of the tools and regulations in the fight against corruption, whether in response to the current crisis or by looking at the horizon in a longer term scenario, needs, much

more than before, to factor in the crucial contribution that can come from the youth, as the main agent in the digital transformation of our societies.

Raising the understanding and awareness of young generations on the real and serious dangers and impacts of organized crime and corruption is of fundamental importance, as it will bring the long expected attitudinal change, needed for effectively combating this crime.

I am truly pleased that the OSCE' Albanian Chairmanship has been a great promoter of the systematic inclusion of youth in all set priority areas. As Vice President of Luiss University, I continuously stress the importance of enhancing the education of next generations on the essential role of the rule of law and good governance. Education, indeed, is essential in promoting the rule of law and a culture of lawfulness.

I do hope that, leveraging on the provisions of the OSCE Framework for Strengthening OSCE Efforts on Youth and Security, the future commitments of the OSCE Participating States on the fight against corruption shall envisage a meaningful reference to the youth and to the agency that it can provide in enhancing the sustainability of our public governance systems.

Thank you