

**Opening Address of the OSCE PA President, H.E. Mr. George Tsereteli
OSCE CiO Conference “Developing anti-corruption strategies for the digital
age: recent trends and best practices in the OSCE area”**

12 November 2018

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the organizers, the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Corruption, Professor Paola Severino, and the Director of the International Affairs Institute (IAI), Nathalie Tocci, as well as the LUISS University for hosting us.

I would also like to welcome the Italian Chairmanship of the OSCE for the active work and dedicated commitment they are showing in addressing the scourges of corruption and organized crime.

This was clearly illustrated by the appointment of Professor Severino as our Organization’s first Special Representative on Combating Corruption, and her dedicated work to establish a network of experts to assist and support our participating States in combating corruption.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly fully embraces the Chairmanship’s work in this field and hopes that the future OSCE Chairmanships will keep up such an engagement.

Today, I greatly appreciate this opportunity to share views on such an important topic of our common agenda.

Distinguished Colleagues,

In 2016, during its Annual Session which took place in my hometown, Tbilisi, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly adopted an important resolution on *Acting against Corruption in the OSCE Region to strengthen the Rule of Law*.

In this document we acknowledged the uttermost importance of fighting corruption and the serious threats it poses to democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Later, also the OSCE Ministerial Council rightly stated that “*corruption and lack of good governance are potential sources of political tension that undermine the stability and security of participating State*”.

On a global scale, we can safely say that any of our Development Goals are simply unreachable without a strong commitment to fighting corruption.

It erodes confidence in public institutions, creates dissatisfaction with public services, stifles business growth and investment, and poses a heavy burden on our time and resources.

Take for example a recent study of the European Parliament, which estimates the losses due to corruption in Europe up to 300 billion euro annually. That’s equivalent to the annual GDP of some strong European economies alone!

But beyond these figures, we must remember that very often, it is the poor and the most vulnerable who suffer the most from corruption.

Throughout the OSCE area, we have heard stories of our citizens forced to bribe their way into receiving the most basic public services – be it to obtain administrative documents, to receive medical treatment, or to go about their daily lives. I hope today we can also hear about good practices on how to tackle these issues.

In addition, also protracted conflicts, uncontrolled borders and migration can also constitute pernicious sources of corruption, which is what makes it key to take a comprehensive approach to addressing economic, humanitarian and security issues in the OSCE area.

We should never forget the lessons of the 2008 financial crisis and how this was enabled by a weak oversight and regulatory framework.

It is the job of elected representatives to ensure the well-being of our citizens and this sometimes means standing up to powerful economic interests. We must realize that corruption is not inevitable, no matter our traditional local culture. Too often have politicians used this as an excuse for inaction.

More transparency and accountability should be on the very top of our political agenda, especially in times when digital access has considerably raised the expectations of our citizens.

It is the responsibility of all our participating States, poor and wealthy alike, to increase our efforts in this fight.

My own country of Georgia has been hailed as a very positive example for the bold public reforms we introduced some 15 years ago to root out corruption. In a relatively short period of time, we managed to reform the police, the educational system, strengthen tax collection, and clean up customs.

I have been part of that able team, and in this context, I can attest myself how much the toolbox offered by modern digital technologies has assisted us in this process and is positively affecting our citizens.

Our experience underlined that strong and sustained political will is essential to unroot corruption. What it also showed is that permanent oversight is needed to ensure that achievements are not reversed.

On all above mentioned fronts, parliamentarians are good partners to promote anti-corruption efforts.

As our activities demonstrates, the OSCE PA is an effective platform to share experiences and best practices.

The OSCE PA has long engaged with the topic of combating corruption, adopting recommendations on how to address the various aspects involved. I hope that you will closely examine our proposals, and that they will inform your continued work in this field.

Among our acquis, I already mentioned the PA resolution on *Acting against Corruption in the OSCE Region to strengthen the Rule of Law*, which, inter alia, calls to: a) prioritize the fight against corruption in our political agenda; b) review national legislation and enhance international mechanisms; c) ensure maximum transparency in politics, administration, economics; d) promote a shift in general attitudes to recognize corruption as an intolerable practice.

Moreover, we regularly debate reforms that would help combat corruption, ways to increase transparency and accessibility in government, how to successfully fight transnational threats such as organized crime, money laundering and terrorism financing. In this context, we should also make full use of international mechanisms such as the UN Convention against Corruption.

As you know, the PA is also very active in election observation. Concerning elections, two aspects are key. One is the increased risks posed by digital technologies to the regular transparent electoral processes and the second is our own accountability.

As a matter of fact, we are currently undergoing a review of our internal Code of Conduct for EOMs to ensure the highest levels of integrity within our Assembly.

Towards this end, we are introducing more stringent procedures regulating appointments and conduct of observers in our election observation missions.

As parliamentarians we have the responsibility to craft the legal frameworks that can maximize the actions of our governments, strengthen public oversight, empower civil society and the media in monitoring our progress.

We are also here to raise our citizens' concerns and generate the political will necessary to act.

Dear friends,

Our success largely depends on taking an all-inclusive approach in fighting corruption.

Let me also emphasize that, especially in the current context characterized by worrisome divergences, geopolitical engineering and challenging dialogue in the OSCE region, the fight against corruption is one of the very few topics that has the potential to promote convergence and common ground between participating States. We must unite our efforts and advance our agenda in this field.

In conclusion, I thank you once again for organizing this conference and assure you of the OSCE PA's continued support on these endeavors. I wish you all productive discussions today!

Thank you!