

Opening remarks of PDHR Roderick W. Moore at the Conference “Countering Corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina”

Sarajevo, June 12, 2012

I'd like to begin by thanking the Center for the Study of Democracy and the Center for Investigative Reporting for producing the Corruption Assessment Report.

I commend these two NGOs for their active part in fighting corruption. In particular, I am pleased to see CSD here, an organization with which I have worked closely during my almost 6 years of working in Bulgaria.

The report warns of disturbing trends. Alarmingly, most citizens believe corruption has *increased* in recent years, for instance.

Moreover, it points to widespread cynicism: citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina believe public officials are likely to be corrupt – and they see little evidence that the judicial system is able or willing to put those who are corrupt behind bars.

I must say that my own experiences in this country track with this conclusion.

Over and over, citizens around this country have told me of their scepticism that powerful, corrupt officials – the very people who are supposed to be protecting and serving them – can be punished here.

Moreover, the report cites statistics that corroborate these observations. It refers to a recent survey showing that fewer than a third of alleged corruption cases have been properly investigated, even after media exposure. It describes “a striking shortage of cases against high-level politicians or key organised-crime players”.

And even when cases do make it into court, results have been disappointing. A third of nearly 1500 corruption prosecutions in the past five years have resulted in acquittals, and sentences in most of the remaining cases have either been suspended or reduced to fines. By way of contrast, federal prosecutors in my country achieve convictions in about 90% of cases against corrupt officials. Sentences are frequently harsh.

This is a bad situation, but I believe it can be changed.

In fact, the Report stresses that the tools that are needed to fight corruption are already in place in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

What’s missing is the political will to use those tools.

Initiatives that don’t produce visible results simply reinforce the cynical view that corruption is an inevitable part of BiH life. The country’s leadership must display zero tolerance for corruption – and model this behaviour themselves. Leaders must put in place anti-corruption measures with real teeth.

Most importantly, the country’s political, law enforcement, and judicial institutions must demonstrate their willingness and ability to punish harshly – including prison – corrupt public officials, regardless of their position, affiliation, or name.

To help make such radical change happen, I believe that citizens, NGOs, and the media must become much more active.

They must demand that their governments provide honest, transparent leadership. They must demand that the police, prosecutors, and courts punish those who stray from these values.

This has happened in other countries. It can happen here.

Thank you.