

Speech by High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko Seminar on Combating Corruption Organised by the Faculty of Criminology and Security Studies



Time to Turn Popular Indignation into Political Force

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Corruption is a massive obstacle on Bosnia and Herzegovina's road to stability, prosperity and full integration in the European Union. If participants at today's conference can make practical recommendations on how to eliminate this obstacle you will be doing a great service to the people of this country.

The conference brings together judicial, police and academic experts from across the region, which means you will be able to compare effective strategies and best practice, and also deal with aspects of the culture in Southeast Europe that may be relevant in the fight against corruption.

Efforts to combat the problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina have met with very limited success, and as a result citizens have to endure injustice and the threat of physical harm, day after day and in every part of the country. This is an unacceptable situation and one that requires an orchestrated and sustained response.

Let me begin by highlighting one bright spot in an otherwise rather grim landscape.

At the beginning of this year, Bosnia and Herzegovina took an important step forward by establishing the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption and the Coordination of the Fight against Corruption.

The Agency will work on identifying and eliminating causes of corruption, deterring persons from committing corruption-related criminal acts, and above all on raising public awareness so as to create an attitude of intolerance towards corruption.

It will look into corruption at all levels and in every field, in order to promote transparency and accountability in the authorities and institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. With this institutionalised anti-corruption mechanism in place, what we need to ensure now is that the Agency has the staff and resources to do its job properly.

Establishing the Agency is an important step in implementing the ambitious anti-corruption agenda that is a core element of the European integration process.

The reforms on this agenda will bring Bosnia and Herzegovina closer to Europe but – every bit as important – they will make life in this country significantly better *long before* EU membership is achieved.

Specifically, the Anti-Corruption Agency has the authority to dedicate all available means to deter officials from stealing

from the people. This applies to politicians, police officers, parliamentarians, petty bureaucrats – from the most powerful to the most humble.

The Agency, of course, has the full public backing of the entire political establishment. No party publicly *supports* corruption; every party is vociferously committed to stamping it out.

Yet the battle isn't being won.

Part of the reason is that anti-corruption measures have fallen foul of the parliamentary deadlock that has stopped the entire European reform agenda in its tracks.

And of course, many officials who champion the cause know very well that if it were to succeed they would be denied funding and influence – so they pay lip-service to anti-corruption while doing very nicely from its relative lack of success.

These are serious problems, but in my view they are not the key cause of the failure so far to curb corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The political constellation can and will change, and when it does we will get the European agenda back on track. Likewise, politicians will mend their ways when it becomes clear that certain practices are no longer acceptable and carry the risk of punishment.

The real reason that corruption remains a scourge is that it is *accepted*. Corruption flourishes because a minority gets away with it and the majority lets them.

Every single citizen will tell you the scale of the problem – yet popular indignation has so far not been translated into popular action.

People say: It's always been like this in our country, and it always *will* be like this.

Well, *nothing* will change as long as that attitude prevails. It is therefore imperative that, in addition to creating and supporting appropriate institutional mechanisms to tackle corruption, we do whatever we can to turn the righteous indignation of the people into an effective political force.

This can be done through the media, as we have seen in other European countries, where cases of corruption revealed by investigative reporters have caused a storm of public anger that forced the authorities to take appropriate judicial and police action.

Corruption is a curse when politicians ensure that their unqualified clients are appointed to powerful positions – but it runs all the way through society from the upper echelons of politics. It is also a curse when doctors refuse to attend patients until a gift has been given, when students pay money to pass exams, when building permits are granted only after agreement about a small consideration on the side.

These are crimes.

And they need to be treated as crimes.

When honest citizens start reporting corruption to the police and to prosecutors as a matter of course, it will become *dangerous* for officials in this country to accept bribes because they will face the certainty of criminal punishment. Media exposure can play a role, too – the prospect of public humiliation is a powerful disincentive to taking money on the side – the certainty of judicial punishment leads to the rule of law. And the rule of law, in turn, is the only real guarantee that citizens will be protected from corrupt officials.

Corruption is an unnecessary and unjust burden that the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina are forced to carry. This is a scandal and it is high time we put an end to it. The Anti-Corruption Agency is a step forward in this. I hope that

today's conference can recommend other necessary steps and explore how they can be taken quickly and effectively.

Thank you