

**ADDRESS BY THE OSCE PA SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE**  
**ON FIGHTING CORRUPTION**

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at the

**Parliamentary Web Dialogue**

**Parliamentarians & Journalists: Partners Against**  
**Corruption**

Wednesday, 14 October 2020, 15:00-18:00 CET

Distinguished Guests,

Honourable Colleagues,

I would also like to warmly welcome you to this important Web Parliamentary Dialogue exploring the contributions of parliamentarians and journalists in fighting corruption. Thank you for joining us today in, what I believe, will be a very thought-provoking discussion.

Before giving the floor to our distinguished guests for their invaluable presentations, I would like to say some words as the OSCE PA Special Representative on Fighting Corruption.

Dear Colleagues, corruption hampers our democracies, curbs development, weakens the rule of law, and undermines stability in our countries. It affects all sectors of society and represents an imminent threat to our security, especially as it proliferates across international borders.

Today, we are here to remind ourselves that both parliamentarians and journalists are key actors in monitoring authorities' actions and holding them accountable before the public. In fighting corruption, we work in the interest of citizens. When we join forces, we can more successfully prevent abuses of power and uncover corruption scandals, ultimately reinforcing public trust in State institutions, as well as in the work of free and independent media.

I truly believe that our roles complement each other. On the one hand, we, the parliamentarians, are clearly responsible for creating pertinent anti-corruption legislation, empowering independent institutions and law enforcement, promoting media freedom, scrutinizing the work of our Governments and

adopting effective internal regulations to prevent corruption among our own ranks.

On the other, journalists play a vital role in fostering transparency and accountability in our societies and political systems by uncovering and publicly exposing malpractices, and by fighting impunity.

Of course, for media to play an effective role in this context, journalists must be free and independent, and the media environment needs to be pluralistic, safe and protected from undue (state or private) influence. It is only in such an environment that journalists can retain their public information function and actively contribute to curb corruption.

Unfortunately, this is not easy to achieve. For instance, a research conducted by Transparency International this year shows that on average, every week at least one journalist is killed in a country that is considered highly corrupt and one in five journalists die while covering a story about corruption. These numbers, dear Colleagues, are extremely worrying and should concern us all.

I am therefore confident that today's event will enable us to explore new opportunities to reinforce our strategic partnership. Distinguished expert speakers, I very much look forward to hearing your insights in this regard!

Dear participants, I would now like to bring to your attention a few issues which I deem critical in today's debate:

- First, **protecting whistle-blowers**. Informing - or even leaking information to – law enforcement officials, the media and the public about experienced corruptive practices, so-called whistleblowing, should not be punishable by law. In fact, quite the contrary! Strong legal

frameworks should be developed to protect the identity and safety of citizens, journalists and politicians who have the courage to expose corruption.

- Second, **media ownership needs to be 100% transparent**. Public information is simply too important to leave the matter unregulated in our countries. This is to avoid the creation of excessive concentration - or even monopolies - of media, which would limit pluralism of information and hamper our democracies. Citizens have a right to know who owns all the newspapers, TV channels, radio and online portals they follow.
- Third, the **influence of editors, publishers and state bodies** on investigative journalists should be limited to the bare minimum. Journalists should be encouraged to pursue their own “investigations” independently, responsibly, and exclusively in the interest of the public. The goal should always be to uncover corruption wherever it resides, rather than to attack one political side, or the other, depending on the editor’s affiliation. Media freedom is an incredible asset in fighting corruption.
- Fourth, I believe that politicians should be more pro-active in regulating issues such as **conflict of interest, transparency in party financing and lobbying** practices. Perceptions of corruption in the political system have been consistent, signalling a systemic citizens’ mistrust in the bodies that are supposed to represent them. In this regard, the adoption of well-conceived Codes of Conducts could also help to build an atmosphere of credibility and ethics. For parliamentarians, they offer clear and much needed guidance on “dos” and “don’ts”. For citizens, they represent a reference point based on which they can assess our behaviour.

- Lastly, I agree with Marco that it is impossible to avoid relating to the ongoing **COVID-19 pandemic**, which has greatly influenced our everyday lives. With unprecedented amounts of public funds being pumped into the economy for emergency spending measures, it is essential to ensure that strong transparency and anti-corruption guarantees are in place and fully operational. In addition, some governments are tempted to use the pretext of the health crisis for tightening restrictions on media and jailing reporters for misinformation. This is unacceptable and plays in favour of corruption!

In conclusion, while moving towards a corruption-free society is a burdensome, and often discouraging process, it is truly the only way - fighting corruption must remain a top of priorities in all our countries! Our Citizens demand that!

Keeping in mind the centrality of the principles of accountability, transparency and oversight in protecting our democracies from corrupt practices, I now look forward to hearing more from our distinguished guests, as from all our fellow participants.

Thank you.