



## Šibenik Conclusions: Strengthening a Culture of Integrity

On 23 and 24 May, an international conference was held in Šibenik, Croatia, to look at how to strengthen a culture of integrity in Southeast Europe. The event, co-hosted by the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration of the Republic of Croatia and the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, gathered justice ministers and other high-level officials from the justice and public administration fields, heads of anti-corruption authorities from the region as well as representatives of international and regional organizations, civil society and academia.

The justice ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the fight against corruption, guided by a comprehensive strategic approach focused on targeted preventive and criminal justice initiatives and interventions.

A number of key points were raised during the conference:

No country is immune to corruption. Therefore, it is important for states to **learn from each other's experiences** in dealing with the problem. The Šibenik conference provided a useful opportunity for countries from Southeast Europe to learn from each other's experiences in preventing and fighting corruption, including those of Croatia as both a neighboring country and a member of the European Union.

The event highlighted the corrosive links between organized crime and corruption and the so-called '**organized corruption**', which refers to the use of positions of power to gain financial, political or social benefits. As corruption is an enabler of organized crime, it was suggested that anti-corruption and anti-organized crime efforts should be more closely harmonized.

Although significant progress has been made in prosecuting corruption crimes, including cases of grand corruption, there is a constant need for re-evaluation and improvement in this very challenging and important area.

The strengthening of integrity is one of the cornerstones of corruption **prevention**. A strong preventive component, including transparency, access to information, anti-corruption education and protection of whistleblowers, should be the focus of national strategic anti-corruption frameworks, with the aim to create systemic solutions for minimizing the opportunities for corruption at all levels of the state.

In the context of strengthening a culture of integrity, the conference highlighted the importance of raising awareness of the harmfulness of corruption and the need to report irregularities. This includes education on the phenomenon of corruption, especially in schools and universities, and organization of public campaigns and events aimed at raising awareness of the necessity to fight corruption.

The conference highlighted the importance of the **United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)**, which is the most comprehensive, legally binding and universal instrument against corruption. It recalled the political declaration entitled “Our common commitment to effectively addressing challenges and implementing measures to prevent and combat corruption and strengthen international cooperation”, which was approved by consensus by the Conference of States Parties (7 May 2021) and adopted by the General Assembly on 2 June 2021 at its special session against corruption. In addition, the importance of other international mechanisms in the fight against corruption was emphasized, such as the application of the Council of Europe’s Criminal and Civil Law Conventions on Corruption and the work of the CoE’s anti-corruption body GRECO.

Participants underlined the importance of the engagement of all levels of society in the prevention of corruption. **Civil society** and academia play a very important role in this context by adding value to the anti-corruption policy making process, assessing the effects of implemented measures and implementing educational and other awareness raising activities. Furthermore, it is vital to ensure space for the civil society and freedom of the media in order to keep the spotlight on corruption and to build bridges between civil society and government in the strengthening of integrity.

Southeast European states have made a number of important anti-corruption commitments, including those to the European Union. The strength of those commitments lies in their **implementation**. The conference participants underlined the importance of frameworks and processes designed to help states implement their commitments and strengthen accountability, including the UNCAC review mechanism, the Berlin Process and the Regional Roadmap on Anti-Corruption and Illicit Finance Flows.

The corrosive effect of corruption affects every member of society by undermining trust in public institutions, which results in erosion of the rule of law. The fight against corruption therefore has to include every citizen, to show that corruption will not be tolerated. The **whole-of-society approach**, as discussed in Šibenik, emphasizes the importance of connecting the crucial elements of society with the aim of promoting common approaches to a common problem.

Recent technological developments have enabled not only new types of criminal offences in the field of corruption and organized crime but also a new *modus operandi* for their commission and hiding of the proceeds of crime. These new challenges are especially visible in the context of cryptocurrencies, and they require an effective response from the law enforcement. Systematic trainings, adequate equipment and legislative framework are crucial in this respect. These elements should be complemented by a strengthened bilateral and international cooperation, also in the context of international organizations which define common challenges and possible common solutions.

Participants also stressed the potential of science and research and technology for enhancing transparency.

The conference participants expressed their great appreciation to the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration of the Republic of Croatia and to the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime for organizing and hosting this important event on the Croatian coast, and underlined the importance of strengthening a **culture of integrity**. They also expressed a hope for similar regional events in the future.