

# GRECO CONFERENCE ON “GENDER DIMENSIONS OF CORRUPTION”

Prague, 13 December 2013

## Address by Marin MRČELA, President of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO)

*Check against delivery*

Dear First Deputy President,  
Dear Minister,  
Excellences,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

**F**rank Herbert, author of a 20<sup>th</sup> century American science fiction classic, wrote: “Power attracts the corruptible. Suspect all who seek it.”

Yet, knowledge about what causes individuals – men or women – to engage in corrupt or illegal practices remains scant. Establishing and exploring the nexus between gender and corruption has rarely been undertaken in Europe, and the relevance of a gender dimension in the prevention and fight against corruption awaits more widespread recognition.

The **goal** of our brainstorming conference today is to examine – for the first time on a pan-European scale – the potential gender implications of corruption. We will also ask ourselves whether and how further exploration of this issue might enrich and add value to the monitoring activities performed by the Group of States against Corruption, as well as the work of other structures of the Council of Europe.

The **programme** of the event is built to reflect **three key approaches** for addressing the interrelationship between gender and corruption.

The first, and perhaps most controversial one, is based on the premise that **gender may play a role in explaining corrupt behaviour**. Proponents of this approach claim that men’s proclivity for corruption is inherently higher than women’s. They insist that women are less likely to be involved in bribery, more willing to condemn corruption, and that a larger share of women in parliament, public administration and the labour force entails with lower levels of corruption.

Should we then readily accept that women are a more scrupulous and fairer sex than men? And can the increased presence of women be a quick fix to reduce corruption?



Another strand of research challenges this view. It claims that any meaningful discussion of gender and corruption has to revolve around the issue of power. With similar power and opportunities, women are equally likely as men to extract bribes and engage in corrupt behaviour. Also, the impact of gender on corruption decreases if factors, such as the rule of law, freedom of the press and democracy are taken into account. Therefore, more egalitarian and participatory societies can achieve reduced corruption and gender equality at the same time, and better governance is not specifically a consequence of women's advancement.

It is, however, an undisputed fact that public perception levels, as measured by *Transparency International* and other corruption and integrity indicators, are significantly lower in countries where there is higher representation of women. This is supported by a statistically strong correlation between the increased participation of women in governance and reduced corruption (although no causality has been established). Therefore, even if we accept that the susceptibility of a person to corrupt behaviour cannot be determined by his or her sex, empirical data proves that opportunities for successful corruption are reduced and corrupt transactions likely to fail in those settings where the gender parity principle is adhered to.

A clear consensus exists with regard to a second approach which underscores the **disproportionate and differentiated impact that the many facets of corruption have on women and men**. Since corruption is often associated with endemic disregard for human rights, minority and less-advantaged groups tend to suffer disproportionately. According to *Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer*, women around the world consistently perceive and experience higher levels of corruption in public institutions than men. This is particularly the case for services that women have the most contact with, such as education and health care. Also, since women and girls represent a higher percentage of the poor, they are considerably more exposed to various forms of abuse and may face systemic discrimination in education, justice, health care, employment, particularly when corruption is the currency of access. Thus, women and girls can often be subject to sexual extortion, harassment, exploitation and the use of sex as a return payment. Where bribes are paid to protect the perpetrators of criminal acts against women - such as rapists or sex traffickers - from prosecution, the risk of women's rights being jeopardised is substantially heightened. Two areas of public service – justice and law enforcement – need to be particularly sensitive to upholding women's rights.

Differentiated experiences of corruption are then often translated into differentiated reactions to corrupt behaviour. Depending on the country, women may be less able to defend their rights and challenge corruption when it occurs. In situations where the currency of corruption is sexual extortion or abuse, the probability of its denouncement is significantly diminished. Also, in cases where public institutions are male-dominated, there are fewer opportunities for women to convince policy makers of their needs and concerns.

Finally, a third approach to the interrelationship between corruption and gender has evolved from more global **policies to enhance gender equality and achieve gender mainstreaming**. It might be useful to recall that gender mainstreaming was defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1997 as: "... the process of assessing the implications for women and men, of any planned action, legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy of making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated." As with other goals and reforms, policies aimed to promote gender equality may be derailed by corruption, the effectiveness of gender equality policies as a whole depends on the effective identification and tackling of corruption.

Ladies and Gentlemen,



here should be no doubt that the prevention and fight against corruption should benefit all citizens. The main priorities of anti-corruption policies are greater transparency and more accountability which require changes in institutional rules and practices. Nevertheless, the dimensions of corruption will be more accurately identified and the design of anti-corruption policies and strategies will be enhanced, if gender is explicitly taken into account when examining the **types and impact of corruption** in the different national and local contexts.

Therefore, the key to successful anti-corruption gender-sensitive policy making lies in the quality of gender-specific information. So far, most of the countries in Europe lack **gender specific data** and rarely, if ever, undertake in-depth gender analyses. The collection of data on the concrete experiences of different groups should become integral to the analysis of corruption, to inform meaningful solution seeking.

Taking account of a gender dimension in the context of increasing gender equality also adds to the democratic capacity to prevent corruption and is essential to **effective democracy building**. Therefore, taken together, anti-corruption policies and policies aimed at women's advancement can produce positive, long-lasting results.

Within GRECO we believe that further clarifying the gender dimensions of corruption is fully in line with our monitoring mandate as well as the broader democratic, human rights and rule of law values of the Council of Europe. Therefore, in June 2012 we were one of the first Council of Europe bodies to appoint a Gender Equality Rapporteur – my distinguished colleague Ms Helena LIŠUCHOVÁ. We are also pleased that other Council of Europe structures have expressed a genuine interest in and supported the relevance of gender responsive anti-corruption initiatives. We are delighted to welcome today representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Group of States on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) and the Commission for Gender Equality. I trust that together we can further raise awareness of this issue and undertake joint actions in the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Aung San Suu Kyi**, a Burmese human rights activist, once said that “It is not the power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it.”

I trust that all of you who have gathered here today in the beautiful Historical Chamber of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic are free from fear, regardless of whether you are a man or a woman.

In our anti-corruption endeavours, let our courage, determination and expertise benefit both genders - women and men.

Thank you very much for your attention.

I conclude by warmly thanking the authorities of the Czech Republic for their hospitality and for hosting the first pan-European conference on such a multifaceted and important issue.