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Human Rights, Environment and Economic Crimes: Youth at the forefront

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The protection of human rights and the environment are interdependent and intertwined. The Heads of States and Governments of the Council of Europe, through the Reykjavik Declaration[1], made a clear statement that the full enjoyment of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is fundamental to permit a life of dignity and well-being for present and future generations.

The progressive degradation of the environment is a global threat which requires an urgent and coordinated approach by all actors involved. Fighting climate change and preserving the environment are at the core of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which provides a shared blueprint for peace, prosperity, and the planet, as well as its annual Climate Change Conference.

The Council of Europe is part of the international endeavours to urgently address these challenges and the Reykjavik Summit stressed the need to deploy additional efforts to protect the environment as well as to counter the impact of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity on human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

The impact of corruption on our societies, including in the enjoyment of human rights, is recognised internationally. Undeniably, various forms of criminal activities including economic crimes and corruption negatively impact environmental protection both at the level of policy development and their implementation. Hence, both national and international actors are increasingly focusing their work on identifying linkages between economic crimes in general and corruption more specifically with the negative impact on the protection of the environment.

The Council of Europe, as part of its pioneering role in developing standards to address global challenges, has undertaken several initiatives in this area, including measures such as the elaboration of a new Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal law. Similarly, and taking into consideration the impact of environmental crime on our societies, in December 2021, the European Commission (EC) adopted a proposal for a new Environmental Crime Directive (ECD) that would contribute to the European Green Deal by strengthening the protection of the environment through criminal law.

Through its multidisciplinary approach consisting of setting norms and standards, monitoring the compliance with these standards[2] and offering capacity building initiatives, the Council of Europe has supported member States, but also non-member States, in developing policies, legislation, and operational procedures in the fight against economic crime, including projects dedicated to strengthened anti-corruption and anti-money laundering response to environmental crime. [3]

[1] https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/fourth-council-of-europe-summit
[2] Through the work of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).
[3] Specific component of Horizontal Facility regional project (HFIII) in the Western Balkans

YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE FOREFRONT

Since 2018, the world has witnessed strong mobilisations of young people who raise their concerns and act for climate justice. Young people have proven to be a driving force in influencing, advocating for, and demanding responsible climate behaviour, climate justice and stronger political commitment at all levels. They also play an important role in contributing to good governance and sustainability all around the world, as they are best positioned to influence their peers and drive change in attitudes and behaviour.

According to data available, besides climate change, corruption is one of young people's main concerns[4]. Young people are particularly vulnerable to corruption. According to the European Commission's Special Eurobarometer on Corruption 2022, 22% of young people aged 15-24 agree that they are personally affected by corruption, with 35% thinking that is it acceptable to give favours, 34% gifts and 25% money. At the global level, previous surveys, revealed similar concerns with, for instance, 30% of young people having accepted a bribe[5].

However, what the surveys on perceptions on corruption by young people do not clearly show, is how much young people are aware about the impact of economic crime and corruption on the environment, or to what extent young people are fighting corruption and bribery as part of their efforts to combat climate change.

THE LISBON FORUM – A INTERREGIONAL PLATFORM

Since 1994, the Lisbon Forum of the North-South Centre is a chief yearly event that provides a platform for interregional exchange between representatives of government, parliament, regional and local authorities, and civil society – the *quadrilogue* - on the global role of the Council of Europe in the areas of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. In line with the mandate of the North-South Centre, the Forum has a global vocation, with priority focus on the Southern Mediterranean region and Africa.

Building on the Council of Europe's priorities as defined at the Reykjavik Summit, this year's Forum will focus on the linkages between economic crime, corruption, and the environment, with an emphasis on the role that young people play as agents of change in the fight against corruption for the protection of the environment.

The 29th edition of the Forum will be a milestone event part of the new strategy of the Council of Europe to strengthen the links between its Neighbourhood policy with the Southern Mediterranean and the North-South Centre, making full use of the added value of both. The latter will contribute with its wide geographical approach and provide its long-standing expertise on empowering youth and youth organisations in the Council of Europe's neighbouring regions to further ensure ownership of democratic reforms by young people in the Southern Mediterranean.

FORMAT AND PARTICIPANTS

The Forum is an interregional event that gathers representatives from national governments, parliaments, local and regional authorities, and civil society, together with youth organisations, academia, foundations, and media.

LANGUAGES

The working languages of this event will be **English, French, and Arabic**

[4] https://widgets.weforum.org/partnering-against-corruption-initiative/index.html

[5] According to Transparency International's Global Barometer 2013, available a Global Corruption Barometer - Transparency.org

This event is organised in the framework of the North-South Centre's project "All Informed, All Concerned" with the support of the joint programme of the European Union and the Council of Europe "Protecting human rights, the rule of law and democracy through shared standards in the Southern Mediterranean" (South Programme V), co-financed by both organisations and implemented by the Council of Europe.

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