

**Bullet points**  
**GRECO President, Marin Mrčela**  
**High Level Opening**  
**Conference “Strengthening transparency and accountability**  
**to ensure integrity: United against corruption”**  
**Šibenik, 15-16 October 2018**

Secretary General  
Ministers  
Excellencies,  
Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Welcome to Croatia! It is great to be here, in my own country, as President of the Council of Europe anti-corruption body – GRECO – during our Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, for this highlight and high-level event of the Croatian Chairmanship. I am proud that the Croatian government places the fight against corruption so high on its agenda.
- Out of respect for my country, let me continue in Croatian for a moment....I will come back to English a bit later...
- Public sector integrity has been at the core of GRECO’s evaluations. Whether it is about transparency of political financing or corruption prevention in the three powers of the state – the judiciary, the executive and the parliament – GRECO has been strong in recommending all our 49 member states to have specific transparency and accountability mechanisms in place to prevent corruption.
- Indeed, corruption is like a virus. Prevention is always best, including through adequate vaccinations, because when one gets ill, sickness spreads throughout the body. And this is not good for us.
- When top executive functions, the judiciary or parliament are captured by corruption or vested interests, democracy is in peril, the Rule of Law fails and Human Rights are under attack. This is a perfect recipe for shattering public trust in our Institutions and for populist movements to emerge. This is why I am alarmed when GRECO’s recommendations are not fully implemented, ignored or reversed. The full implementation of all GRECO recommendations by all our member states is key to minimizing opportunities for corruption at all levels of the state. So, I start by calling on all GRECO member states present here today to do more and better.
- Ladies and Gentlemen, I continue in English now.

- No country is immune to corruption. Did you know that nearly half of the top performing 20 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index underwent a GRECO non-compliance procedure in the past 5 years because the situation was judged "globally unsatisfactory" by GRECO? Our evaluations are not about perception or hear-say; they address the reality; the concrete measures that countries have implemented – or not – to counter corruption. Perception and reality do not always match. In GRECO there are no "usual suspects": everyone, every country, and even bodies of our own Council of Europe – like the Parliamentary Assembly - are, and will continue to be, treated alike.
- GRECO will continue to raise the red card and draw attention to the risks and shortcomings and push for the right reforms:

...when politicians are failing to manage conflicts of interest, or not declaring gifts such as apartments or trips;

...when we see shady or obscure party funding systems,

...when judges are at the same time Mayors or MPs, or pay part of their salary to the political parties who vote for them;

...when parliaments fail to adopt codes of conduct for MPs,

...when politicians are recruit family members as their personal advisors;

...when Ministers are the ones who decide who our judges or prosecutors should be and how they should behave, in total disregard of the principle of judicial independence,

...when parliamentarians or even Ministers insist that family members be excluded from their asset declarations;

...when "little or bigger deals" enable entrepreneurs to bribe public officials to gain a slice of the "public procurement-cake";

...when countries ignore for a certain number of years their self-assumed obligation to comply with our recommendations; because these recommendations, dear colleagues, are NOT OPTIONAL!

- GRECO will also react as and when we see countries undertaking reforms which run counter to the anti-corruption standards they have themselves subscribed to. Our new Rule 34 procedure – so far applied in the cases of Romania and Poland – allows GRECO to be both vigilant and proactive. We will not hesitate to use it again.
- And since I am in Croatia - and one should first keep one's own house in order – I call upon the Croatian Parliament to now adopt a Code of Conduct for MPs. Croatia is not

the only country where this is lacking, but this reform is long overdue because that obligation is dated back nearly 5 years ago.

- It has been claimed that we are too “soft” or lose ourselves in minor details, missing the big picture. Quite the opposite is true. We care about the big picture. This is exactly why all countries need to get their acts together and comply with our recommendations which focus on prevention. We want countries to have the necessary barriers in place to stop corruption BEFORE it arises. AFTER, it is too late!
- When these preventive measures are not there, society will act alone. In many countries, people have taken to the streets in recent months to shout their anger and rejection of corruption and integrity failings, involuntarily fueling disruptive populist movements.
- It is particularly timely that this Conference devotes a Session to the media. Independent media play an essential role in preventing corruption by shedding light on dirty deals and exposing conflicts of interest and corruption. I want to pay tribute here today to the life and work of Ms. Daphne Caruana Galizia who was murdered just one year ago because she was doing her job. Everything must be done to bring those who perpetrated and ordered that crime to justice. The Archbishop of Malta, Mr. Scicluna, put it very well a few days ago by saying that: people who administer justice must protect others from the arrogance of power. I can’t agree more.
- My final word is about the role of national anti-corruption bodies. They have a key preventive role, but to exercise it, they should be truly independent and empowered to pursue their mission. It is very positive that the Conference is aiming at improving their interaction and exchanges internationally on a very practical level. We don’t need yet another “talking shop”: we need tools that enable these agencies to exchange operational information on concrete cases and I am glad that they will be taking measures in this direction at this Conference.
- Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude. I hope you have understood by now that GRECO is not about politics. It is about a technical, legal analysis of the tools all of your countries and institutions have in place to ensure integrity and prevent corruption. Membership of GRECO is not a “free-ride”: it comes with rights but also obligations, it comes with prestige but also commitment to the process.
- I hope that, if for nothing else, the dramatic level of public mistrust in our Institutions – be they national or supranational – will prompt those who have the power to act, to do so, to strengthen our integrity systems and raise the barriers against corruption.