



#CoE\_WFD

## Lab 2 - "Corruption and populism: can the international community help?"

*Sponsored by the Group of States against Corruption and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*

### *Moderator:*

Mr Michele NICOLETTI, Italy, Member of Parliament and Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Rapporteur on "Promoting integrity in governance to tackle political corruption"

### *Initiatives:*

Integrity of elected politicians, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights – ODIHR, (Poland) by Mr Jacopo LEONE, Democratic Governance Officer, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Group of States against Corruption - GRECO of the Council of Europe by Mr Christophe SPECKBACHER, Administrator Officer at the Secretariat of the Group of States against Corruption - GRECO

### *Discussants:*

Ms Gülsün BILGEHAN, Turkey, Member of Parliament and Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Mr Finn HEINRICH, Germany, Director of Programmes, Democracy Reporting International

## The lab in brief

Corruption is the abuse of public power for private benefit. Corruption threatens the rule of law, democracy and human rights, undermines good governance, fairness and social justice, distorts competition, hinders economic development and hampers growth. Corruption can be used as an instrument to increase fears and to deceive citizens. It endangers the stability of democracies, undermining trust in public institutions as well as the moral foundations of society.

The lab explored how the international community could strengthen the fight against corruption.

## About the initiatives

### Integrity of elected politicians (Poland)

The initiative aims to improve integrity in parliaments and political systems, by promoting the adoption of codes of conduct by national parliaments, in order to set high ethical standards for members of parliament in due consideration of their duties towards the state and the society.

A legislative code of conduct is intended to create a political culture, which places considerable emphasis on the propriety, correctness, transparency and honesty of parliamentarians' behaviour. These codes cover various topics: conflict of interest, conduct in chambers, lobbying and third parties, gender equality, use of parliamentary resources. They should increase the politicians' ability of self-monitoring, as well as restore public trust in those politicians.

Over the last ten years, twelve national parliaments across the OSCE participating States adopted codes of conduct. Beneficial effects have already been proved: they helped members of parliament in raising the level of professionalism into politics; they allowed the civil society to judge the parliamentary conduct; they introduced a healthy debate on ethical standards and integrity, etc.

Nevertheless, further additional research will need to be conducted in the upcoming years, to better classify different types of codes of conducts, looking at the specificity of the areas they attempt to regulate.

### Group of States against Corruption - GRECO of the Council of Europe

Since its establishment, the Council of Europe has addressed corruption as a serious threat to democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Anticorruption instruments, like the *Twenty Guiding Principles for the Fight Against Corruption* (1997), the *Criminal Law Convention on Corruption* (1999), have been adopted. GRECO's priorities are to prevent corruption in the legislative and executive branches of powers and to increase the transparency and supervision of political financing. GRECO works in cycle, called evaluation rounds, each round covering specific themes. To fulfil this mission, GRECO follows a two-step procedure comprising a mutual evaluation and a compliance programme, which is applied to all members for each evaluation round.

## Key points issues by the debate

Corruption in the common perception. Citizens don't know much about corruption because corruption is by nature something secret (as it could have negative effects on the reputation of concerned institutions, NGOs, governments etc.). Furthermore, corruption is barely reported and its measurement is complex. There is, in addition, an information gap between regulations on paper and the effective corruption level of certain countries (e.g. Uganda). The main challenge is to enforce legislations and recommendations.

Finally, there is a correlation between the economical level of a state and its corruption level. For the civil society, the most corrupted groups are the political parties and politicians at national, regional and local levels.

Corruption and populism. The emergence and success of populism is usually connected to a crisis of democratic systems. The most exposed to its influence are political systems which experienced an institutional transition. People do not feel anymore that they can voice their dissatisfaction effectively, or that their interest is the important factor for elites in power. Corruption is a vicious circle: to win elections, populists use the discontent and the fear of the populations, but at least once in power, they tend to be the most corrupted.

## Recommendations

- ✓ To fight for more transparency and to combat corruption by protecting journalists, investigative reporters and whistle-blowers (e.g. the platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists, created by the Council of Europe).
- ✓ To guarantee judicial independence for the conduct of investigations.
- ✓ To educate citizens against corruption by spreading ethical values and by adopting codes of conduct in schools and universities.
- ✓ To strengthen the coordination between the international community and other institutions, organisations, NGO's etc. for a joint fight against corruption, as only the combination of efforts of international organisations, domestic institutions and civil society can make such a fight effective.
- ✓ To provide support by the international community to states and investigators who want to expose facts or behaviours related to corruption.
- ✓ To encourage the adoption of codes of conduct in national parliaments and democratic institutions in order to promote integrity, transparency and public trust.