

Reinvigorating Anti-Corruption Cooperation in Southeast Europe

Keynote address by Mr Krum Zarkov, Minister of Justice of the Republic of Bulgaria

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Your Excellences,

Honourable members of the European Parliament,

Honourable representatives of the Judiciary,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you at this gathering. It is quite an important event where serious civil society organizations and public institutions deal with one of the most important and dangerous topics - the fight against corruption.

In Bulgaria, we engaged on a path to meet the highest standards of rule of law and anti-corruption policy. We have been through many mechanisms in light of the Bulgarian accession to the EU – from the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism to EC's annual report.

In this very moment as I am speaking, we are also in the middle of another important reform spurring public debates and causing political turmoil. Nonetheless, more than ever, we understand that it is not only about laws. It is most of all about their implementation. This implementation could never be effective without cooperation in the region and at global level, including surveillance and monitoring by the civil society. This is why we consider this initiative of utmost importance. Moreover, we are ready to take every single opportunity to engage in a fruitful cooperation.

One of these opportunities is presented by the initiative called Summit for Democracy launched by the American President Joe Biden. Currently, we are preparing for the next summit and Bulgaria has the opportunity to co-lead a cohort on anti-corruption policy. A cohort that you are very welcome to join. If you decide to join, I hope that I will see you in person here in Sofia in mid-March for our big conference covering all these topics.

Scepticism exists about the very ability of our country and those in the region to tackle effectively internal and external corruption. However, we know better than anyone else that we do have our success stories. We have our own institutions but we need to put up a fight to strengthen them in order to be more effective. We will be more effective if we stand together. We are working on making this effort more coordinated.

In the capacity of a Minister of Justice, I witness on a daily basis very effective cooperation between our public entities and our services, but also with the civil society. An excellent example is the regional anti-corruption coalition SELDI and I look forward to following up with them, as well as with every single one of you, to share specific ideas and concrete actions that we may undertake forward together.

Thank you very much and I wish you the best.