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Press conference: “Reporting and accountability as anti- corruption mechanism”

Belgrade, 4th December, 2014

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to today’s press conference on behalf of the Rule of Law Program South East Europe of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Today we will be discussing an analysis on the topic of “Reporting and accountability as an anti-corruption mechanism”.

I wish to express my profound thanks to our partner organization Transparency Serbia with which we had an excellent cooperation in the past which we hope to continue in the future.

(...)

As the fight against corruption is one of our core missions we happily supported the project initiated by Transparency Serbia. If this country fights corruption determinedly and makes substantial progress this will definitely facilitate and speed up this country’s way into the European Union.

So how does the European Commission assess the situation of corruption in Serbia? Let me quote from the latest progress report published in October this year:

“Fight against corruption

There is a strong political impetus to fight corruption. Serbia further implemented the recommendations of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). The implementation of the national strategy on the fight against corruption for the period 2013-2018 and its related action plan have yet to mirror the strong political impetus to fight corruption. Several measures were delayed and key developments are expected in the short to medium term, in particular laws on whistle-blower protection and legislative

changes in the field of conflicts of interest. Monitoring and coordination mechanisms for the implementation of the national anti-corruption strategy and action plan have yet to yield results. A track record on effective verification of asset declarations and checks on party funding needs to be established. Corruption remains prevalent in many areas. Significant efforts are needed not only to enhance and fully enforce the legal framework for the fight against corruption but also to back these reforms with appropriate resources. Inclusiveness of stakeholders throughout the process should be guaranteed.

The new inter-ministerial coordination mechanism put in place in August is a positive initial step but its impact on the ground remains to be assessed. Attention needs to be paid to providing the Anti-Corruption Agency and Anti-Corruption Council with sufficient resources and to ensuring the follow-up to their proposals and recommendations.

Final convictions, especially for high-level corruption, remain rare. Further efforts are needed to establish a convincing track record of investigation, prosecution and final convictions. A sustainable solution is needed to address the excessive recourse to the provision on abuse of position in the private sector in the criminal code. The review of the economic section of the criminal code needs to be completed without delay.

Finally, repeated leaks to the media about ongoing investigations, in breach of the presumption of innocence, are an issue of serious concern.”

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So there is good news and there is bad news according to the EU Commission. Of course also the analysis that will be presented today points both at progress that has been achieved but also at deficits that have been identified and where further efforts remain necessary. But as the analysis will be presented by Transparency's Programme Director, Mr. Nemanja Nenadic, I will refrain from commenting on it.

I wish, however, to congratulate the authors of the study because it is my conviction that the key findings and conclusions of this study are very concrete and can be very useful for stake-holders in this country.

I hope that the recommendations will not only be discussed but will lead to further improvements. If the EU Commission's assessment that "there is a strong political impetus to fight corruption" is correct this should be the case.

Once again I thank all those who have contributed to this project but also each of you who participates in this press conference.