

**14th ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE
OF THE EUROPEAN PARTNERS AGAINST CORRUPTION (EPAC/EACN)**

BULGARIA, 16-19 NOVEMBER 2014

SOFIA DECLARATION 2014

We, the heads and key representatives of the national Police Oversight Bodies and Anti-Corruption Authorities of the Member States of the Council of Europe and the European Union, having met in Sofia, Bulgaria, from 16 to 19 November 2014 for the 14th Annual Professional Conference and General Assembly of the European Partners against Corruption (EPAC), including the European contact-point network against corruption (EACN), welcome the achievements of recent years and declare as follows:

Expressing our gratitude to the Ministry of Interior and the State Agency for National Security, for generously hosting this conference and for greeting us with such warm hospitality;

Seriously concerned about the significant effects of the economic crisis on the work of police oversight bodies and anti-corruption authorities, potentially jeopardizing previous achievements and rendering current tasks more challenging;

Reiterating the imperative need to ensure transparency, legitimacy, accessibility, accountability, impartiality, and integrity in all systems guiding police oversight and anti-corruption work;

Promoting respect for the rule of law and human rights in all police oversight and anti-corruption activities;

Recalling numerous international conventions, instruments and mechanisms, such as the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), the Council of Europe Civil and Criminal Law Conventions on Corruption, the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions, the EU Hague Programme and EU Stockholm Programme of 2009 which call for the development of a comprehensive EU anti-corruption policy, Strategic guidelines within the area of freedom, security and justice adopted in June 2014 by the European Council, the European Commission's Decision on establishing an EU anti-corruption reporting mechanism for periodic assessment, adopted in June 2011 and the first Anti-Corruption Report of February 2014; also recalling the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the UN principles relating to the status and functioning of national institutions for protecting and promoting human rights (Paris Principles), the European Convention on Human Rights, the Council of Europe's European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union;

Recalling as well the EPAC/EACN Declarations adopted in Krakow 2013, Barcelona 2012, Laxenburg 2011, Oradea 2010, Nova Gorica 2009, Manchester 2008, Helsinki 2007, Budapest 2006, Lisbon 2005, and Vienna 2004;

Acknowledging perceived deficiencies, as expressed through public opinion, in the fight against corruption and at the same time particularly calling on our anti-corruption authority members to live up to public expectations to provide effective remedies against corruption;

Welcoming the achievements of the first four sessions of the Conference of the States Parties to the UNCAC, and particularly the progress made during the fifth session held in Panama in November 2013, as well as achievements of the Anti-Corruption Academic Initiative (ACAD) of UNODC;

Calling on stakeholders to follow a holistic and comprehensive approach in the fight against corruption, which shall be based on, inter alia, prevention, education, (law) enforcement, and international cooperation;

- **Welcome** the High-Level Panel on the Rule of Law preceding the UN General Assembly, the relevant resolutions previously adopted by this organ, and stress the importance of fighting corruption in the context of the rule of law and good governance;

- **Welcome** the increased number of ratifications of UNCAC, nearing universal applicability, and encourage States which have not yet done so to ratify this vital legal instrument;
- **Call** for the implementation of 2015-16 G20 Anti-Corruption Action Plan agreed at G20 Summit in Brisbane, Australia 2014, and the continued implementation of principles agreed upon at the G20 and B20 Summit in Los Cabos, Mexico 2012, and welcome the Saint Petersburg Strategic Framework, Russia 2013, especially encouraging all stakeholders to foster and enhance collective action with the corporate business community, and including the C20 and other representatives of the civil society;
- **Welcome** and call for the robust national implementation of the findings and recommendations of the GRECO Evaluation Round reports, including the ongoing 4th round, and the recommendations stemming from the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention and related instruments;
- **Recognize** the valuable achievements made in the process of the UNCAC Implementation Review Group, the Working Groups on Asset Recovery and Prevention, as well as the establishment of the Expert Meeting on International Cooperation;
- **Encourage** the continuation of the work towards the establishment of an independent and efficient European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) as a major step to facilitating cross-border investigation and prosecution of fraud affecting the financial interests of the EU, including corruption cases;
- **Welcome** the achievements of a workshop on exchange of information among the EPAC/EACN members, which was organized on 24th of October 2014 at Laxenburg, Austria and the establishment of a working group chaired by the National Crime Agency (UK) to look into the practical details of a possible adoption of a dedicated communication tool for EPAC/EACN within the Europol Platform for Experts (EPE);
- **Welcome** the setting up of a working group chaired by the Anti-Fraud Office of Catalonia to provide the contribution of EPAC/EACN for upcoming European Commission Anti-Corruption Report;
- **Recognize** legal and practical challenges concerning whistleblowing, its value and importance in fighting corruption, and call for an analysis of factors which either hinder or could be used to encourage it;
- **Support** the work of the International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA) in the development of professionalism of anticorruption bodies;
- **Strongly call** for the implementation of the *Anti-corruption Authority Standards and Police Oversight Principles*, unanimously adopted by the EPAC/EACN General Assembly in 2011, and commend their broad dissemination;
- **Express** our sincere thanks to IACA for hosting the Secretariat and providing it with the necessary resources to effectively carry out its mission;
- **Recommend** that the text of the Declaration be widely circulated by the members in their respective countries and that it be submitted by the EPAC/EACN Secretariat to the EU Presidency, the European Commission, and the Council of Europe's GRECO.