

ATHENS TI - 12 December 2014

Remarks Pascal Lamy

Dear Costas,
Friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first thank TI Greece for its kind invitation to address you to day. Both honour and pleasure: this event connects two different parts of my heart: my commitment to and engagement for TI and its fight against corruption and my love for Greece as French and as European. Both started together in the 90's and are still very much there.

The question I want to address this evening from a global perspective is the following: how is Greece doing in the combat against bribery? "Better but still a very long way to go" would be my short answer. Greece ranks n° 69 among countries in the last CPI, as compared to 80 last year and 94 two years ago. A clear improvement, but still pretty low down the list by European standards.

Let me explain in a bit more details. In looking at the 3 obstacles we, in TI, know by experience, have to be overcome successively in order to eliminate corruption:

1 silence

2 incapacity

3 impunity

On the *silence* hurdle, I think, TI Greece, with others, has done a good job.

The level of awareness is high as evidenced by opinion polls: 99% of Greeks consider corruption to be a widespread problem in the country, 80% that it hampers business activities, more that 60% that it affects their daily life.

So the Greek people care which is a necessary, if not a sufficient condition to push back on corruption.

But more that 45% also believe that government is ineffective in fighting against this cancer.

This is obstacle n° 2: *Incapacity*. Coping with it implies a proper institutional and legal system to be in place as well as adequate resources for implementation.

Here, I would say the glass is half full/half empty. True, a road map for action has been agreed with the EU task force two years ago together with an action plan. True, some new pieces of legislation have been adopted. But the system remains both too complex and too dotted in areas such as conflict of interest, or asset disclosures concerning politicians, or protection of whistle blowers or anticorruption safeguards in public procurement. And the resources available for the national anticorruption coordinator remain too thin.

Las but not least: *impunity*. Whatever awareness, policy or action framework are in place, what matters at the end of the day is that the corrupt feel threatened and unsafe. And this has mostly to do with the credibility of the police and of the judicial systems. Investigations and prosecution must take place when complaints are lodged, including by the ALAC, court sentences must be delivered at the appropriate level of severity and deterrence.

Here, I believe it is fair to say that fist results have started to appear, but in no way commensurate so far to the size of the problem. The feeling of impunity is still widespread. And let us remember that corruption is not only in the public sector. Business, business people, business organisations also have a major role to play in taking their own responsibilities.

This is why TI international and national chapters in the region are very much behind the TI team in Greece in its efforts to move forward. Especially in priority areas which have been identified, such as the health care sector (as mentioned earlier this afternoon), tax administration, supervision of party funding, ethical codes for elected official at central and local levels, reforming the statute of limitation rules concerning current and former members of government, and, as already said, business practices.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have said here, in Athens, on various occasions, that Greece is undergoing a revolution. A painful one in economic and social terms, as we all know. But these specific conditions also offer a huge opportunity for change. Whereas there may be different views on the way ahead for your country to exit the crisis, I do not think anybody would dispute that less corruption, less favouritism, less conflict of interest is not both indispensable and doable. And like all times of revolution, civil society and movements like ours have a major role to play

Let me conclude in congratulating TI Greece for the efforts done so far, in wishing that you will keep supporting our common cause, and in reaffirming my personal willingness to help and my own engagement on your side.