Initial Summary and Conclusions

From Regional Cooperation to Collective Action: Advancing Integrity and Anti-Corruption in South-East Europe

Tirana, 15 October 2026 – Regional and European leaders, policymakers, anti-corruption practitioners, civil society representatives and international partners gathered in Tirana for the Berlin Process side event *"From Regional Cooperation to Collective Action: Strengthening Integrity and Anti-Corruption in South-East Europe."*

The event was organised by the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI), in partnership with HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, the Government of Albania and the Minister of State for Public Administration and Anti-Corruption of Albania, with the support of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), International Partnerships Austria and the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania.

The event reinforced a shared commitment to advancing anti-corruption reforms across South-East Europe (SEE). Its central message was clear: progress must be measured not by commitments or legislation alone, but by implementation, institutional accountability and tangible improvements in people's lives. Integrity should not be just a matter for the central government, as well as for the local authorities, businesses, civil society, journalists, and citizens that should also contribute to. Under RAI's and partners regional leadership, cooperation can help translate national commitments and European standards into practical action and measurable results.

From Political Commitment to Practical Implementation

Structured around a high-level political and a multi-stakeholder dialogue, the event brought together regional and European perspectives through four thematic panels, addressing both longstanding governance challenges and emerging corruption risks.

The high-level political dialogue focused on strengthening independent and effective integrity systems, an efficient asset declaration's system, accelerating institutional reforms and aligning regional anti-corruption efforts with European priorities, including the EU Anti-Corruption Directive and the forthcoming EU Anti-Corruption Strategy. Across the discussions, participants emphasised that effective anti-corruption efforts require more than legislative and policy commitments. Consistent implementation, institutional capacity, effective oversight and cross-border cooperation are essential to delivering tangible improvements in transparency, accountability and public trust.

The multi-stakeholder dialogue explored how integrity can be strengthened through local governance, citizen participation, civil society engagement and responsible business practices. It also examined emerging corruption risks related to migration and environmental governance, alongside opportunities offered by digitalisation, artificial

intelligence and innovative anti-corruption tools. Participants underlined that technology should respond to clearly identified institutional needs, protect personal and sensitive data, and remain subject to meaningful human oversight and accountability.

Reforms need clear institutional responsibilities, implementation timetables, adequate budgets, public integrity indicators and independent review. Risk assessments, integrity systems, asset-declaration verification, conflict-of-interest and whistleblower protection should be central to preventive and repressive measures. Progress should be assessed through verifiable outcomes, not simply laws adopted or activities delivered.

Strengthening Regional Cooperation for Tangible Results

A central message emerging from the event was the need to position regional cooperation not solely as a platform for political dialogue, but rather as a practical mechanism for mutual learning, collective action and advancing reforms. RAI, with the support of its partners, is well placed to convene regional institutions, connect national reform priorities with EU processes, and facilitate the exchange and adaptation of tested approaches across South-East Europe.

Priority areas highlighted throughout the discussions included strengthening institutional independence and accountability, supporting the effective implementation of EU anti-corruption standards, expanding cooperation between public institutions and non-state actors, and developing coordinated responses to emerging and cross-border corruption risks.

Particular emphasis was placed on strengthening practitioner networks, and exploring secure cross-border exchange and verification of relevant information, including asset declarations and illicit financial flows. Digital innovation can support prevention, detection and oversight, provided that data quality, interoperability, cost, privacy, security and human accountability are addressed.

The discussions also recognised that integrity must be visible and meaningful at the local level and in the citizen's life. A bottom-up approach to local governance helps enhance transparent municipal decision-making, access to public information, participation in planning and budgeting, and public monitoring of resources. Civil society, independent media, community groups and responsible businesses are important partners in building trust and holding institutions to account.

Key Recommendations and Next Steps

1. **Enable environment for institutional independence and accountability of Anti - corruption authorities:** Safeguard the political, operational and financial independence of anti-corruption bodies, alongside effective oversight, transparent procedures and accountability.
2. **Make EU Anti-corruption standards into visible progress:** Support the WB region in aligning national frameworks and practices with the EU Directive on combating corruption, and the forthcoming EU Anti-Corruption Strategy. Clear responsibilities, timelines and indicators to track implementation will help shape priorities for prevention and more coordinated action in the years ahead.

3. **Regional cooperation as a practical mechanism for advancing reform:** Expand practical cooperation, sharing best EU practices and the exchange of proven tools among anti-corruption authorities(e.g. International Treaty on the exchange of data for the verification of asset declarations), law-enforcement institutions, civil society organisations and businesses, including coordinated responses to cross-border corruption risks.
4. **Civic oversight over the Anti-corruption reforms - Building institutional integrity:** Promote transparent local governance, meaningful citizen participation, stronger civil-society engagement and responsible business practices to build public trust and accountability. Civic education is equally crucial to shaping Western Balkan societies where integrity becomes a shared social norm, and corruption carries real social consequences.
5. **Work on preventive measures, anticipatory anti-corruption measures that produce concrete results**: Explore digital tools and artificial intelligence to strengthen prevention, detection and oversight, while ensuring transparency, safeguards and accountability in their use.
6. **Transparent and accountable institutions and governments:** Governments should commit to providing relevant information/data that could serve as objectively verifiable indicators for progress on Anti-corruption reforms (political and financial transparency), relevant for EU accession.

Suggested next steps: RAI, Helvetas, and regional partners should translate the event's shared priorities into a concise regional follow-up agenda, identifying lead institutions, practical activities, and indicative timelines. Identify opportunities for joint capacity-building, peer exchange and the adaptation of effective integrity and anti-corruption tools across South-East Europe. Connect national reform priorities with relevant EU processes and regional initiatives, and monitor progress through concrete outputs and measurable results. Maintain dialogue among public institutions, civil society, the private sector and international partners to support implementation and share lessons learned.

Key Message

RAI, Helvetas and its partners will turn regional cooperation into a practical instrument for reform, sharing best EU practices and tools, including cross-border verification of asset declarations, and coordinating our response to cross-border corruption. Institutional mechanisms are not enough; integrity cannot be built through institutions and regulations alone. It grows when citizens, civil society, businesses and local governments have a meaningful role in shaping reforms, monitoring their implementation and holding institutions accountable, use digital tools and AI with proper safeguards, and publish verifiable indicators of progress in line with EU accession requirements.