

Speech of Mrs. Sonila Qato
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**COLLECTIVE ACTION IN THE FIGHT FOR INTEGRITY
AGAINST CORRUPTION**

A popular view is that business interests fuels corruption because businesses benefits from evading the law. However, a growing body of evidence shows the contrary, that high levels of corruption harm the private sector.

Although much has been done to fight corruption in these past few years, Albania still rests on political, socio-economic and cultural foundations that only moderately support integrity. Corruption has been a serious plague for the Albanian economy, forcing business to operate amidst legislative instability, significant informality and arbitrariness in the public administration.

However, we have come to understand that corruption, more than any other behavior, fuels crime and public distrust - the main enemies of good governance. This increased attention to the costs of corruption has given rise to more and more reform efforts by the government, international donors, and non-governmental organizations. The current government vowed to fight Albania's corruption by introducing a comprehensive reform agenda on integrity, anti-corruption and formality, most visibly in the justice system and economic policies.

Albania has ratified most conventions related to the fight against corruption, has conducted training sessions on integrity and ethics in public administration for hundreds of servants and has also used information communications technology as an innovative tool in the fight against corruption, through the creation of websites and phone applications dedicated to denouncing corruptive acts. Also last year was approved the whistleblower law on signaling and the protection of

whistleblowers. This law was firmly supported by the Dutch Embassy in Albania, and I would like to thank them for their contribution. Due to these mechanisms, according to international reports, there has been a steady decline in the Albania's Corruption Index points from 2012 to 2016.

Ultimately, the Government has included in its political structure a new Institution such as, the State Ministry for the Protection of Entrepreneurship. The institution was established in order to improve transparency and partnership between public institutions and business and to protect as well the legal rights of entrepreneurs. The vast majority of these efforts focus on the public sector, such as through regulatory reform and the creation of new oversight bodies. However our office believes that without a collective action and the synergy of all parties it will be difficult to cure such an old wound that still puts at risk Albania's integration as part of the EU. We are working to grow awareness and to involve multiple stakeholders, especially the private sector, to addressing corruption and integrity issues.

The government cannot achieve sustainable objectives without a collective action involving all key stakeholders. We believe that in the fight against corruption, a coalition of companies united by a set of principles and standards can have a far greater aggregate impact, transforming this way into a role model. Therefore it is indispensable to introduce a new business approach that charges business and business association with social responsibility. Large enterprises and business associations should engage in the promotion of proactive disclosure and voluntary integrity systems, including codes of conduct, integrity pacts, whistleblowing systems, integrity training, and anti-corruption reporting. If private stakeholders do not pull together to combat corruption, it is possible for some businesses to default and thus receive the temporary advantages of participating in corruption. This approach, in collusion with government-initiated reforms, will enhance business ethics by restoring high standard of merit and fair competition that are very important to us.

On the other hand, The Ministry for the Protection of Entrepreneurship will continue its close communication with the business sector, through developing platforms of dialogue with all the actors from public-private areas. These platforms include the two councils, the National Economy Council and the Investment Council, as instruments of transparency, inclusiveness and collective action in the creation of the best governmental policies. The dedicated website of the Ministry and the various communicative platforms developed by us, will again serve as instruments for achieving this goal

Attractive business climate can be achieved only through good governance, the endorsement of best international policies and integrity practices as the ones promoted by the OECD and shared in this panel, and by strengthening capacities amongst public and private institutions, that are instrumental in the fight against corruption.

My Office is committed to promote ongoing regulatory and policy reforms as well as companies' solid principles and policies of transparency, ethics and risk management, not just for legal compliance, but also as an ethical and necessary part of good management. We are convinced that by setting these standards for responsible business behavior in areas such as employment, human rights, the environment, corruption, consumer interests and fair competition, we will contribute to open a new chapter in the culture of doing business in Albania.

Business does not only affect itself and the economy. When enterprises fail to act responsibly, they can put in danger the environment, human rights and, ultimately, the future of a country.