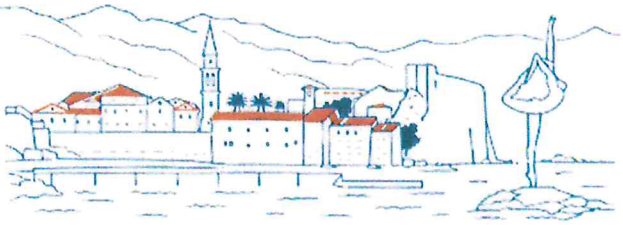
25th EPAC/EACN
Annual Professional Conference
and General Assembly



BUDVA-MONTENEGRO 2026

25TH EPAC/EACN ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

5–7 OCTOBER 2026, BUDVA, MONTENEGRO

BUDVA DECLARATION 2026

We, the heads and key representatives of national Police Oversight Bodies (POBs) and Anti-Corruption Authorities (ACAs) of the Member States of the Council of Europe and the European Union (EU),

Expressing our sincere gratitude to the Agency for Prevention of Corruption and the other authorities of Montenegro for hosting the 25th Annual Professional Conference and General Assembly of the European Partners against Corruption and the European contact-point network against corruption in Budva, Montenegro, under the theme "Protecting Public Integrity and EU Financial Interests: Practical Cooperation Against Corruption, Fraud and Misconduct";

Recalling international conventions, instruments and mechanisms, in particular the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC); the Council of Europe Criminal Law Convention on Corruption and Civil Law Convention on Corruption; the monitoring mechanism of the Group of States against Corruption of the Council of Europe (GRECO); OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions and the work of the OECD Working Group on Bribery in International Business Transactions; and the OECD Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ACN), including its Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan (IAP);

Recalling relevant European Union instruments aimed at combating corruption, fraud and organised crime, protecting the Union's financial interests and strengthening the rule of law, including Directive (EU) 2026/1021 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2026 on combatting corruption and Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law;

Recalling the EPAC/EACN Declarations adopted in The Hague (2025), Bucharest (2024), Dublin (2023), Chisinau (2022), Vilnius (2021), Stockholm (2019), Rust (2018), Lisbon (2017), Riga (2016), Paris (2015), Sofia (2014), Krakow (2013), Barcelona (2012), Laxenburg (2011), Oradea (2010), Nova Gorica (2009), Manchester (2008), Helsinki (2007), Budapest (2006), Lisbon (2005) and Vienna (2004);

Deploring the continuing acts of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and the rule of law, and expressing continued support for Ukrainian anti-corruption institutions, law enforcement authorities, oversight bodies and civil society actors in their efforts to safeguard integrity and accountability despite the ongoing atrocities of war;

Expressing concern about legislative, administrative or institutional reforms that may weaken the independence, mandate, resources, operational autonomy or effectiveness of ACAs, POBs, prosecution services, law enforcement bodies and other integrity institutions, and calling on all stakeholders to ensure that such reforms are transparent, evidence-based and aligned with international standards;

Acknowledging that corruption, fraud, misconduct and undue influence in all their forms represent serious threats to democracy, the rule of law, security, sustainable development, public trust and the sound management of public resources;

Recognising that corruption and fraud affecting public funds, including the Union's financial interests, undermine public confidence, distort fair competition, weaken the effectiveness of public policies, and jeopardise solidarity, recovery, reconstruction, accession-related reforms and long-term development;

Emphasising the importance of effective, independent, adequately resourced and accountable ACAs and POBs as essential pillars of public integrity, law enforcement integrity and democratic resilience;

Welcoming the European Commission's continued efforts to modernise the European Union anti-corruption and anti-fraud framework, including through implementation of the European Union Anti-Corruption Directive, the preparation of the first European Union Anti-Corruption Strategy, and the ongoing review of the EU anti-fraud architecture;

Welcoming the European Commission's Annual Rule of Law Cycle, with the Rule of Law Report, as an important preventive framework for promoting the rule of law, identifying emerging challenges at an early stage, supporting dialogue among European Union institutions, Member States, national parliaments, civil society and other stakeholders, and preventing rule of law challenges from emerging or deteriorating;

Welcoming continued European and international cooperation to strengthen anti-corruption, anti-fraud and integrity frameworks, including through the work of the European Commission, the Council of Europe, Group of States against Corruption of the Council of Europe (GRECO), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and other relevant partners;

Recognizing the contribution of the UNCAC Implementation Review Mechanism, the International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA), GRECO, the OECD Working Party on Public Integrity and Anti-Corruption and the OECD Public Integrity Indicators, the OECD Working Group on Bribery, OECD ACN IAP to peer review and monitoring, the exchange of good practices, the identification of technical assistance needs, policy dialogue and the strengthening of national anti-corruption frameworks;

Welcoming Montenegro's formal accession to the IAP in 2025, and recognising the opportunity this creates to connect peer-review findings with European Union accession-related reforms, regional cooperation in Western Balkans, practical capacity building and the work of ACAs and POBs within EPAC/EACN;

Acknowledging efforts of EU candidate and potential candidate countries, including those in the Western Balkans, as well as Ukraine and Moldova, in fighting corruption and fraud risks linked to reforms, reconstruction, accession processes and large-scale public funding, and *recognising* that practical cooperation, peer learning and capacity building are essential to address these risks;

Acknowledging both the opportunities and risks associated with the use of digital tools and data sources, including artificial intelligence, machine learning, open-source intelligence, beneficial ownership data, asset and interest declaration systems, reporting platforms and digital case-management systems in preventing, detecting and analysing corruption, fraud and misconduct;

Recognising the important role of whistle-blowers, complainants, journalists, civil society, academia and the private sector in exposing corruption, fraud and misconduct, and stressing the need to ensure safe, accessible and trusted reporting channels and effective protection against retaliation;

Welcoming EPAC/EACN's continued exchange of practices, peer learning initiatives, working groups and other forms of professional cooperation, and encouraging all members and observers to contribute actively to the network's activities;

Welcoming a new member organisation from Montenegro admitted by the General Assembly at the 25th EPAC/EACN Annual Professional Conference and General Assembly;

RECOMMEND that participating members, within their respective mandates:

- *Strengthen practical cooperation* against corruption, fraud and misconduct affecting public integrity and public funds, including the Union's financial interests where relevant, through timely information exchange, direct operational contacts, secure communication channels, joint analysis and coordinated follow-up;
- *Contribute, where applicable, to timely and effective implementation of Directive (EU) 2026/1021*, including by strengthening institutional preparedness, training, data collection, protection of reporting persons, investigative capacity and cooperation with competent European Union bodies and agencies;
- *Enhance cooperation with relevant European and international partners*, including EPPO, Eurojust, Europol, OLAF, and other competent bodies, while fully respecting applicable legal frameworks, mandates, confidentiality requirements and procedural safeguards;
- *Develop risk-based approaches* to detect and prevent corruption and fraud in public procurement, grants, subsidies, recovery and reconstruction funds, EU-funded projects, accession-related support and other high-risk areas of public spending;
- *Ensure effective follow-up to identified red flags* by strengthening analytical capacity, evidence-gathering methods, cooperation with audit and managing authorities, financial analysis, systematic documentation of typologies and feedback to prevention functions;
- *Share, where legally permissible, anonymized case studies and typologies* on procurement manipulation, conflicts of interest, double funding, false declarations, undue influence, misuse of grants or subsidies, concealed beneficial ownership, collusion and other recurring corruption and fraud schemes;
- *Promote institutional resilience* by safeguarding operational independence, clear mandates, adequate powers, predictable funding, qualified staff, access to information, internal integrity standards and protection from undue pressure;
- *Strengthen integrity and accountability within ACAs and POBs* through robust internal governance, codes of conduct, conflict-of-interest management, internal reporting channels, transparency measures, professional ethics and regular public reporting;
- *Invest in continuous professional development* for anti-corruption and police oversight officials, focusing on emerging corruption risks, protection of the Union's financial interests, high-level corruption, digital evidence, financial investigations, asset recovery, prevention of conflicts of interests, whistleblower protection, open-source intelligence, data analytics and international cooperation;
- *Promote responsible use of data and technology* by developing analytical tools, risk-scoring systems, data-fusion methods, visualisation, network analysis and anomaly-detection methods, while ensuring legality, proportionality, accountability, human oversight and data protection;
- *Improve the use of beneficial ownership, procurement, asset declaration and conflict-of-interest data* for prevention, detection, investigation, oversight and strategic corruption risk assessment;
- *Strengthen whistleblower and complainant protection* by ensuring trusted reporting channels, confidentiality safeguards, effective examination of reports, protection from retaliation, provision of legal, financial or psychological assistance, and cooperation between competent institutions;
- *Support partner organisations from EU candidate and potential candidate countries* through peer learning, technical exchanges, mentoring, joint training, expert missions and practical cooperation in areas related to accession reforms, EU support, reconstruction and public integrity;

- *Promote implementation of recommendations* issued by international and regional monitoring mechanisms by developing internal follow-up systems, measurable timelines, progress indicators and public communication on results;
- *Contribute actively to EPAC/EACN working groups, peer-learning formats and best-practice exchanges*, including by sharing methodologies, tools, training materials, practical lessons and successful cooperation models;
- *Strengthen public trust* by communicating clearly and regularly about institutional mandates, activities, achievements, challenges and safeguards, while respecting confidentiality and the presumption of innocence;

CALL ON States to actively:

- *Safeguard the independence, effectiveness and resilience of ACAs, POBs and related integrity institutions*, including through clear legal mandates, adequate investigative or oversight powers, access to relevant information, sufficient and predictable resources, merit-based appointments and safeguards against undue influence;
- *Ensure that any reforms affecting ACAs and POBs* are transparent, evidence-based, inclusive and aligned with international standards, and do not weaken institutional capacity, independence, operational autonomy or accountability;
- *For EU Member States, ensure timely and effective transposition and implementation of Directive (EU) 2026/1021*, including its requirements on corruption offences and sanctions, limitation periods, liability of legal persons, anti-corruption bodies or organisational units that operate without undue interference, adequate resources, training, protection of reporting persons, investigative tools and data collection; and, for candidate countries, pursue alignment where relevant in the context of accession reforms;
- *Strengthen national coordination mechanisms* between ACAs, POBs, law enforcement authorities, prosecutors, financial intelligence units, asset recovery offices, audit institutions, tax and customs authorities, managing authorities, public procurement bodies and other relevant institutions;
- *Enhance transparency and open data* by ensuring that, subject to legitimate legal restrictions and appropriate safeguards, information on public procurement, beneficial ownership, public expenditure, EU-funded projects, recovery and reconstruction funds, asset and interest declarations and public decision-making is accurate, timely, accessible as permitted by law and, where appropriate, available in machine-readable formats;
- *Ensure effective access to data for competent authorities*, including through secure, lawful, interoperable and purpose-appropriate data systems that support corruption prevention, detection, investigation, oversight and risk analysis;
- *Strengthen corruption and fraud risk management* in high-risk *sectors*, including public procurement, infrastructure, energy, health, defense, local and regional government, state-owned enterprises, public-private partnerships, grants and subsidies;
- *Improve the prevention of conflicts of interest and undue influence* by strengthening rules and enforcement mechanisms on asset and interest declarations, lobbying transparency, revolving doors, gifts, incompatibilities, political integrity and decision-making transparency;
- *Ensure effective whistleblower protection and reporting systems* that are safe, confidential, accessible and trusted, and protect reporting persons, witnesses, complainants and other persons at risk from retaliation, intimidation or discrimination;

- *Strengthen asset tracing, freezing, seizure, confiscation, management and recovery*, including through early financial investigations, cooperation with financial intelligence units, asset recovery offices and international networks, and timely execution of confiscation and recovery measures;
- *Support responsible digital transformation* of anti-corruption and oversight work by investing in secure case-management systems, analytical tools, cybersecurity, data governance, digital-evidence capabilities and specialised training;
- *Protect persons and institutions involved in anti-corruption work* from intimidation, retaliation, harassment, abusive litigation and undue pressure, including through legal safeguards, security measures and institutional support;
- *Support an enabling environment for civil society, independent media, academia and the private sector*, recognising their role in preventing and exposing corruption, strengthening public integrity and promoting evidence-based anti-corruption policies;
- *Strengthen practical anti-corruption cooperation with EU candidate and potential candidate countries*, particularly in relation to EU funding, accession reforms, recovery, reconstruction and institutional capacity building;
- *Establish effective mechanisms to follow up on relevant* recommendations *and findings* from GRECO, relevant OECD monitoring mechanisms, the UNCAC Implementation Review Mechanism and other relevant peer-review and monitoring mechanisms, and ensure transparent reporting on progress;

CALL ON EU institutions and international organisations, within their respective mandates, to:

- *Support effective implementation of Directive (EU) 2026/1021 and, where relevant, alignment with its standards*, by providing practical guidance, comparative analysis, training, technical assistance and platforms for cooperation among national authorities, the European Commission, Eurojust, Europol, OLAF and EPPO;
- *Promote coherent, mutually reinforcing and practical anti-corruption and anti-fraud standards* that strengthen the effectiveness, accountability and resilience of ACAs, POBs, prosecution services and other competent institutions and protect them from undue interference;
- *Provide targeted technical assistance, funding and training, as appropriate*, to ACAs and POBs, with a focus on the Union's financial interests, public procurement, financial investigations, asset recovery, digital evidence, whistleblower protection, data analytics and institutional resilience;
- *Facilitate structured platforms for professional and, where legally possible, operational exchange*, including case-based learning, typology development, contact-point networks, joint training, secure information exchange and practical cooperation among national, European and international actors;
- *Support EU candidate and potential candidate countries* in strengthening anti-corruption institutions, safeguarding EU support, protecting reconstruction and recovery funds, implementing accession-related reforms and building sustainable integrity systems;
- *Promote responsible innovation and digital capacity* by supporting interoperable and secure digital tools for corruption and fraud risk assessment, beneficial ownership analysis, procurement monitoring, asset declaration verification, reporting channels and case management, consistent with fundamental rights, data-protection and cybersecurity requirements;
- *Support the development of common methodologies* for corruption and fraud risk assessment, red-flag identification and follow-up, data-driven prevention, institutional resilience assessment and follow-up to international recommendations and findings;
- *Strengthen cooperation among anti-corruption, anti-fraud, law enforcement, prosecution, audit and financial intelligence communities*, ensuring that prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution, asset recovery and institutional learning are connected in practice;

- *Promote greater consistency, where appropriate, in standards and practices* on whistleblower protection, beneficial ownership transparency, public procurement integrity, asset recovery, conflicts of interest, lobbying transparency, political integrity and protection of the Union's financial interests;
- *Continue engaging EPAC/EACN members and observers* in relevant European and international initiatives, recognising their practical expertise, operational experience and role in strengthening public integrity across Europe.

This Declaration will be widely circulated by EPAC/EACN members within their respective countries and submitted to relevant EU institutions and bodies, the Council of Europe's GRECO, the OECD Working Group on Bribery, UNODC, EPPO, OLAF, Eurojust, Europol and other relevant European and international partners.

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EPAC/EACN President

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