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Corruption must be tackled "by whole of society"

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BELGRADE -- The whole of society needs to be involved in the fight against corruption, but the government must take responsibility, a conference held in Belgrade has heard.

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(Tanjug)

The gathering was held on International Anti-Corruption Day, December 9.

Speaking at the conference, held ahead of the adoption of a new law on the Anti-Corruption Agency, Tatjana Babić, director of the Agency, said that while the fight against corruption needed the whole of society to be involved, the government was the one that had to take responsibility.

She said that only joint and coordinated efforts could bring about the goal, a society in which corruption would be incidental instead of customary behavior, the opposite of what the situation was like in Serbia right now.

Babić said that cooperation should primarily be seen in legal aid, involving exchanging experiences and exploring the practices of various bodies.

"While conducting our activities, we need to be of service to each other, and faster than is prescribed by law," said Babić.

Dragomir Milojević, president of the Supreme Court of Cassation, said that there was almost no form of organized society that had not experienced negative effects of corruption and in that sense, Serbia was no exception.

He pointed to high level of corruption in the judiciary, which he believes political influences, bad and

non-transparent human resources policies and lengthy trials were to blame the most for.

"It is of crucial importance to stabilize our system and establish the rule of law, and to achieve this we need everybody to be involved in this job," said Milivojevic.

Olgica Batic, president of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption (GOPAC) National Branch Serbia and MP in the Serbian parliament, said that corruption was present in all countries, but the mechanisms to fight it differed.

Only a strong parliament, government and judiciary can be a cornerstone in the fight against corruption, said Batic.

Speaking about the GOPAC National Branch, Batic explained that the body had been formed in the parliament, was made up of current and former parliamentarians, and was not governed by political ideologies.

GOPAC fights corruption and promotes transparency and accountability to ensure high standards of society.

UN Deputy Resident Coordinator in Serbia Steliana Nedera said that it was necessary to strengthen the capacity and authority of institutions involved in the fight against corruption.

The feeling of security is the responsibility of the government, but the citizens also bear a part of the responsibility in the fight against corruption, she said.

Vice President of the Anti-Corruption Agency Miroslav Milicevic said that the fight against corruption had to be permanent, transparent and institutional.

Since its establishment, the Anti-Corruption Agency prepared 35 reports on systemic corruption, and we have good cooperation with the Interior Ministry's Criminal Investigation Department in the cases of 24 disputed privatizations, said Milicevic.

The head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, Michael Davenport, has welcomed, on behalf of the EU, Serbia's unambiguous commitment to the fight against corruption, noting that the country has achieved progress in that area, as indicated in the EU's progress report.

The process is not an easy one, but long and painful, as well as necessary and significant, and the results will be felt later on, through a better investment climate and better life, Davenport told the conference.

Serbia is facing a series of challenges in fighting corruption, many of which are described in the report in an overview under Chapter 23, Davenport noted, adding that Serbia has carried over consistently the recommendations to the first draft of an action plan to implement the recommendations regarding the chapter.

He said that, in the past, the whistleblower protection act has been adopted and that a coordination body has been set up to monitor the implementation of the national anti-corruption strategy, with a group for financial investigations established as well.

There is no efficient fight against corruption without results in financial investigations, and we believe that the commission will resolve the corruption cases in court, in particular, cases of systemic corruption, Davenport said.

In education and health care, the results of the fight against corruption must be visible on central as well as local levels, and progress is expected in the process of privatization and in the operation of state-owned enterprises, where good control and supervision must be established, he said.
