

Remarks by ambassador Ole Egberg Mikkelsen at the conference "The Decade of Transformation – EU-supported anti-corruption and rule law reforms in Ukraine, Kyiv, 16 April 2024

Madam Deputy prime minister, ambassadors, dear friends

Thank you very much to the organizers for inviting me to address you today on the occasion of the launch of the next phases of the EU-programs, EUACI and Pravo-Justice.

I am particularly pleased that the deputy Prime minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Ms. Olga Stefanishyna is with us today and delivered a strong and powerful key note address.

Your speech today is a strong sign of the unwavering commitment of the government and people of Ukraine to the fight against corruption and the promotion of the rule of law.

The fight against corruption and the promotion of the rule of law are matters for Ukrainians to pursue. Your international partners, like Denmark, can assist and support you. But it is only you can fight that battle.

Having been here for four years I have no doubt about the Ukrainian people's will and determination to do so. It is not a coincidence that the Euro-Maidan revolution is called the Revolution of Dignity.

The Ukrainian people poured into the streets back in 2014 to express their desire for closer ties with the EU and their deep commitment to the values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and integrity.

In one word: They wanted dignity!

During my time here in Kyiv I have met some of the activists who were on the streets back then and I have asked them why the revolution is called the Revolution of Dignity.

They are all telling me the same story: They simply found it utterly un-dignified and deeply humiliating to live in a European state with massive and systemic corruption, including at the very top.

The revolution of Dignity was the start of a long and epic battle against corruption and for the rule of law. There has been ups and downs and bumps in the road but there was never doubt about the general direction.

Recently the process has gained both speed and momentum. During my four years here I cannot think of single moment where the political will and determination have been stronger and more decisive when it comes to the fight against corruption and the strengthening of the rule of law.

The decisive moment was the EU-application just four days after the full scale Russian aggression and the subsequent candidate status that Ukraine achieved in June 2022.

This was an enormous boost to the political will and determination to implement reform despite resistance from vested interests.

You, Madam Deputy Prime minister have played an absolutely crucial role in this amazing process. I feel confident that you and the entire government and leadership of Ukraine will continue to show the same ironclad determination in the time to come.

The epic battle against corruption is still not over despite the progress that has been achieved. We all know what the challenges are.

I am convinced that Ukrainians will show the same fighting spirit and bravery in the fight against corruption as you are showing on the battlefield fighting the Russian aggressors.

The accession process will only add speed and momentum to this process. The Copenhagen criteria that were defined in our capital at the European Summit in 1993 is still the benchmark for any applicant country wishing to join the European Union. And the Copenhagen criteria are crystal clear when it comes to strong and stable institutions, including the absence of corruption.

The accession process is solely merit based and based on clear benchmarks. As we have seen already Ukraine has made good progress so far and I am convinced that this will continue.

Denmark is proud to your partner and ally in this epic battle as the delegated partner for the European Anti-corruption partner.

Let me assure you that Denmark will be just as steadfast in our support for your fight against corruption as we are in our support for your armed struggle on the battlefields. Both battles must be won to ensure Ukraine's freedom and European aspirations.

The fight against corruption is also important for the mobilization of resources for Ukraine – both military and civilian support.

We have very frequent visits of ministers, lawmakers, journalists and other opinion leaders from Denmark. One of the first questions they ask is about corruption. Is there a risk that our support for Ukraine will somehow end up in the wrong pockets?

So it is important that Ukraine can demonstrate to international public opinion that every possible steps are being taken to mitigate the risk of corruption the better. In this context I am happy that Denmark's partner in the South, Mykolaiv is one of the integrity cities. This is point that I am always making to Danish visitors.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank the European Commission for the seamless cooperation with you as the delegated partner for the EUACI. We look forward to work with you in the next phase of the program and I am particularly to work with ambassador Mathernova and her team.

It is very appropriate that we mark the launch the next phase of EUACI together with the launch of the next phase of the sister EU-program, Pravo-Justice, supporting the reform of the justice system and implemented by France.

When I arrived here four years ago I was actually a bit puzzled by the fact that Denmark was supporting the establishment of separate anti-corruption institutions outside the normal structures.

Why not use the ordinary police, the prosecution and the court system? But I soon realized that it was necessary to establish separate and independent institutions outside the normal justice system to ensure integrity.

Currently the anti-corruption institutions are so-called "island of integrity". But one they the entire legal and justice system will be one big "continent of integrity".

When that happen the ordinary justice system will be able to take over the fight against corruption. I am sure that one day this will happen as part of Ukraine's reform process and as part of Ukraine's path towards EU-membership

Let me conclude by thanking the staff of the EUACI, the staff of the anti-corruption institutions, the integrity cities, civic society, politicians, the media for your hard and dedicated work fighting corruption.

Denmark is proud to be your partner.