

**Together We Are Stronger?**

**Harmonizing the Struggle  
Against Fraud and Corruption  
in Europe**

**Willi Russ**

**Chairman of the dbb akademie,  
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**Opening  
of the International Conference  
of the dbb akademie  
on February 25, 2008  
in the Maternushaus in Cologne**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the second international conference of the dbb akademie in the Maternushaus in Cologne on the topic “Harmonizing the Struggle Against Fraud and Corruption in Europe”.

Recently — on January 8, 2008, to be exact — I was elected as the new Chairman of the dbb akademie by the organization’s General Assembly.

That makes the opening of this conference my first official act in my new capacity as Chairman, and it fills me with pride and pleasure.

I’m delighted to see that so many speakers and participants have flocked to our conference from no less than **40 countries**. The cities from which they’ve come range from New York to Novosibirsk! What’s more, we have conference participants from **all 27 EU member states** — a statistic that quite a few international conferences at the governmental level might envy us for!

And it’s not only the number of countries of origin that is impressive — it’s also the variety of the institutions that our guests represent.

They include EU institutions, ministries, local authorities, educational institutions, anticorruption bureaus, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), police departments, public prosecutors' offices, courts of justice and internal auditing bodies.

This suggests that we've already reached our goal, which is to bring together the different participants in the struggle against fraud and corruption in Europe.

But your *physical* presence alone does not entitle us to say we have truly brought you together: only the results of the conference will show whether that has happened

I am proud of the responsible members of the dbb akademie who have successfully organized an international conference of such magnitude and high quality.

Now it's up to all of us to diligently work out ways of putting into practice the results of the conference in line with its theme.

The dbb akademie has been dealing critically with the topic of corruption for many years now, in training programs, national and international projects, and large-scale public events.

The first large-scale *international* event on this topic took place in 2006, also here in Cologne, with the support of OLAF, the European Anti-Fraud Office of the European Commission. Because of the extremely positive response to this event, we decided to continue conducting events of this kind.

Once again, we have OLAF to thank for the international composition of our speakers and participants. Without the financial support of OLAF through its Hercule II program, it would have been impossible for many of our guests from abroad to participate in the conference in spite of their tremendous interest in the topic.

Our sincere thanks therefore go to the Director General of OLAF, **Mr. Franz-Herrmann Brüner**, and all of the other representatives of OLAF who are here with us today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

in spite of vigorous national and international efforts, the struggle against corruption in public life and the private economic sector is still a tremendous challenge.

Public attention has once again been strongly drawn to this topic, not only by the scandals in major corporations such as Siemens and Volkswagen in Germany, but also by the negotiations of the

new EU member countries with the European Commission, where the effective combating of corruption has been a crucial criterion for acceptance into the European Union.

There is a general consensus that corruption is causing considerable economic damage throughout Europe, and that it is undermining trust in the integrity and viability of the state, politics and business.

Although the slim likelihood of exposure means that there is little definitive statistical data about the frequency of corrupt activities and the amount of damage they cause, there are nonetheless sufficient indications for us to conclude that the temptation to engage in corruption is at least maintaining a constant high level and may even be growing within the societies of the European Union.

This is confirmed by reports from the experts and by investigations conducted by auditing firms.

There are various reasons for this, and the kinds of reasons differ from one country to another.

For example, there is the shift of values within society (for example, increased orientation toward material values, rejection of the previously acknowledged values of duty and acceptance, in-

creased striving for self-development and satisfaction of individual interests).

There is also the erosion of the sense of injustice (for example, through the poor example set by managers' behavior, compensation for differences in income through dishonest dealings, and the use of dubious practices in administrative or business processes).

We also find organizational structures that encourage corruption (for example, broad discretionary powers for managers or public officials, a lack of regulations or guidelines, insufficient preventive measures, a lack of sanctions against improper behavior, and the absence of positive models),

as well as inadequate supervision or control (for example, work areas that are closed off from scrutiny, absent or unused control mechanisms, trust in colleagues and structures that has not been verified).

On the other hand, sensitivity to this complex of topics has increased, thanks in large part to media reports and the work of the NGOs such as Transparency International.

Ladies and gentlemen,

all of us are called upon to jointly wage the battle against fraud and corruption at the European level and to “harmonize” the tools we use for this purpose.

At our conference we want to discuss how this is to be done, and how we are to interpret the concept of “harmonization“. To my German ears this still sounds a little bit like sweet and noncommittal goodwill, if I may put it somewhat provocatively.

Over the next two days we will offer you presentations and discussions with renowned speakers, as well as in-depth workshops with experts to provide momentum and presenters that have a specialized knowledge of this topic.

And now, please understand that I will be able to greet *by name* only the speakers who are making their presentations this morning, because it would take far too much time for me to name all 20 of the speakers and presenters of our two-day conference.

I would like to welcome as our first speaker the Director General of OLAF, **Mr. Franz-Hermann Brüner**. Mr. Brüner will talk about the function of OLAF as a protector of the financial interests of the European Union, focusing in particular on the most recent experiences and successes of OLAF.

A friendly welcome to you, Mr. Brüner. Your personal involvement in our conference is a great honor for us.

I would like to warmly welcome as our second speaker **Ms. Elisabeth Werner**, a member of the cabinet of Mr. Siim Kallas, Vice President of the European Commission, who is responsible for the area of anticorruption and the connection with OLAF.

Ms. Werner will talk about the joint struggle against fraud and corruption in the European Union and explain the strategic guidelines for these efforts.

Ms. Werner, we are delighted to have you speak to us in your capacity as a member of the cabinet of Mr. Kallas.

Our morning session will conclude with a presentation by **Mr. Drago Kos**, head of the Bureau for the Prevention of Corruption in Ljubljana and President of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).

A cordial welcome to you, Mr. Kos. We look forward to your talk on “The Culture of Cooperation”. I’m sure you will have some critical remarks to make about this topic, thanks to your broad background of experience.

After the afternoon break we will continue with a presentation of best practice strategies in the struggle against corruption from the countries Belgium, Sweden and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as workshops on special topic areas.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of the speakers and presenters, and I wish you fruitful discussions and excellent results.

After what I'm sure will be a day of concentrated work, all of you are cordially invited to meet for dinner this evening here in the Maternushaus. During dinner you'll be entertained by the musical trio "Walk on by", which will play without any technical support so that you can have an opportunity to exchange views and share experiences.

Ladies and gentlemen,

for the next two days the dbb akademie is offering you an international forum so that you can share your experiences and — even more importantly — make personal contacts.

Please take advantage of this opportunity to work together and engage in discussions. Don't hesitate to contribute your views, ideas and experiences. And don't be afraid of any language barriers — our simultaneous interpreters are prepared to deal with different temperaments and heated discussions.

The Deputy Director of the dbb akademie, **Ms. Anke Weigend**, will be the overall chairperson of the conference, and will safely guide you through the two days ahead.

I hereby open the second international conference of the dbb akademie to harmonize the struggle against fraud and corruption in Europe.