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MARCH 2025

LARA WESTPHALEN

"THE LIFE
CURATORS"
INSPIRED BY THE
SÃO PAULO'S
CONTAGIOUS
ENERGY

SLAGJANA TASEVA

IACA's Theme Spirit:
Let's Unify the
Diversity
Live from
Vienna, Austria

Odeta
Barbullushi's
EXPERIENCE AT THE
COLLEGE OF EUROPE

THE WOMEN Editon



Posing with the first IACA
Dean, now Dean Emeritus
Mr. Martin Kreutner

SLAGJANA TASEVA

IACA's Theme Spirit: Let's Unify the Diversity
Live from Vienna, Austria

By Rudina Hoxha & Jose Pinto



The group photo of the IACA team

TRAILBLAZING MAGAZINE/The Women Edition made an elegant stop in Vienna, Austria to interview Ms. Slagjana Taseva, Dean and Executive Secretary of International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA) who is the first female dean who holds such a key position in the 13 years of IACA's history.

Professor Taseva, a national of the Republic of North Macedonia, is specialised in money laundering, financial crime, corruption, and organised crime. She holds a Ph.D. in law from Sts. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje while she has published several books in the field of criminology and criminal law such as (Dark Figures of Criminality – 1996; Money Laundering – 2003 and new edition in 2007; and Macedonian Criminal Law – 2010 – Handbook for students).

In this exclusive interview, she underlined the long journey that led her to this important appointment while pinpointed her love for IACA. "I am a true believer in the mandate and the role of IACA. I can also say that I love this organization. At that time, we (the group that worked on the agreement) knew that IACA would add a lot to the capacity in the international community to

fight corruption. Education is crucial in this respect," Taseva says in this interview.

She aims IACA's growth. "IACA has alumni from 168 countries. Every communication, every work, every training is an added value to the fight against corruption. Since my appointment, we have been talking about opening IACA even more," Taseva states, adding that call for lectures in French and Arabic will be opened besides the English ones.

Currently IACA has 77 member states parties. According to Taseva, it is time to welcome big countries such as Canada, USA and the European countries like Germany, France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Norway, Poland and others to join IACA.

The idea of an international anti-corruption academy arose out of INTERPOL's International Group of Experts on Corruption, which at the time included Martin Kreutner, who became IACA's first Dean (see the main photo), Michael Hershman, Chairperson of IACA's International Senior Advisory Board, and the late Franz-Hermann Brüner, Director-General of OLAF (European Anti-Fraud Office) at the time. The



During the interview with Mrs. Slagjana Taseva. (L)

adoption of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2003 and its subsequent implementation in many countries also played an influential role in IACA's creation.

Full interview follows:

Dean Mrs. Taseva, could you briefly tell us about your professional background that led you to your role as the Dean of the International Anti-Corruption Academy?

This might be a long story (laughing) but I will try to summarize it. I always had an interest in working in the field of fighting against evil, against crime. It all started in my youth when I studied in the Faculty of Security. In the former Yugoslavia, there was only one such faculty located in Skopje, and it was established in 1977. It accepted

a limited number of students, and I was the second generation in this Faculty. In my class, there were 70 students; of them, 15 were women. We were lucky to have the best professors from all over Yugoslavia. When one is exposed to a top-notch program, like we do here at IACA, this is how you become even more interested in and involved. At that time, I never knew that this would be my path. Later, I started to work in the Ministry of Interior in the analytical department where one can study various kinds of crimes from all the points of view. This department collects all the information needed. Then the master's thesis followed. My theme was about the dark figures of crime. I was curious to know "Why people don't report crimes? and "Why the country's crime statistics were low when in reality, criminality levels were higher?". I am talking about the 1990s. I realized that people



Posing with one of the MACD graduate students from Kenya.



The building of IACA



don't report because they don't trust the institutions. From this point of view, I started to develop my interest in this area. I also dedicated one chapter of my first book, entitled "Dark figures of crime," to corruption in the state institutions. In my research, I tried to understand why the institutions, which are supposed to fight crime and corruption, don't do that.

I presented-part of the research at a big conference where the Minister of Interior was present. And latter people asked me how could dare to speak like this in front of the minister!? But this is that kind of professional curiosity which leads you to this area. You must be committed and curious

to look behind the wall and think out of the box. When you are well-educated and speak based on research, you can do it. Because you look broader, you look beyond, and you are brave to speak up.

In 1996, my country adopted a new Criminal Code which introduced criminal offenses of organized crime and money-laundering. The minister, who was present at that conference, said that I was the one to understand such matters and I could establish an analytical department on organized crime at the ministry. At that time, I was working in the eastern part of Macedonia, and I was the only one who was offered to be transferred



to the Ministry of Interior in the capital without requesting that. In addition, I was among a few public servants who spoke English. This gave me the chance to take part in various international conferences, to get international exposure and learn more about how crime and corruption is tackled in various countries.

In 1996, I became the main analyst of organized crime, corruption, and money laundering in the MoI. I was also working on my Ph.D. on money laundering. This topic was very new in general, both for practitioners and scholars. In the nineties there was limited access to the internet, few people had computers, and there was no

literature on the topic of money laundering in general, both in the region and globally. So, I asked the British Embassy to support me in this endeavor. They offered me a one-month study visit to the UK to learn more about money laundering. I learned from their expertise and knowledge and came back with a suitcase full of books which helped me to complete my thesis successfully.

Participation to the international bodies such as MONEYVAL and GRECO in the Council of Europe gave me the opportunity to meet colleagues and experts from different countries. This enabled me to learn about their activities aimed at

fighting organized crime and corruption. In the GRECO committee, I participated for seven years in the capacity of the head of the delegation of my country. As a money laundering and GRECO evaluator, I participated in the evaluation of Poland, Belarus, and Latvia. Thanks to this, I built my knowledge of international standards and practices, and I understood how important is for people to interact and exchange experiences. This was an important lesson, which I have always been trying to capitalize on. In this context, I wish to underline the role of IACA in bringing people together, so they can learn from one another.

In 2000, I stopped working for the Ministry of Interior and I established Transparency International Macedonia. It took several months for me to shift my way of thinking and adopt the perspective of a civil society member. Today, I am Honorary President of Transparency International Macedonia.

In all these years, I also became the head of the Police Academy and head of the Anti-Corruption Commission of Macedonia. They are all important milestones in my career.

Upon the completion of my Ph.D. studies, I have been working for ten years as a university professor of criminal law and organized crime. I lost interest in universities as they were going private and becoming more interested in maximizing the number of students rather than in ensuring the highest possible level of their academic activities. Instead, I focused on consultancy work which sent me to various corners of the World. I worked in Belgrade, Moldova, Afghanistan, Albania, and Papua New Guinea. All these experiences were highly

enriching. Then, the vacancy call for the position of IACA's Dean was published in summer 2023. I have known IACA from the beginning as I participated in anti-corruption summer schools here in 2007 and 2008 when the idea to create this academy was developed. I was invited by Austria and my esteemed colleague Marin Kreutner to work on the draft of the agreement for the IACA establishment. In 2010, I participated in the ceremony to launch the Academy, which was organized in the Hofburg Palace with the involvement of MR. Ban Ki-moon, the eighth Secretary General of the United Nations. The IACA Agreement was signed during this ceremony and entered into force on 8 March 2011. More than 1000 delegates took part in that meeting. At IACA, we cherish a book signed by the participants.

I am a true believer in the mandate and the role of IACA. I can also say that I love this organization. At that time, we (the group that worked on the agreement) knew that IACA would add a lot to the capacity in the international community to fight corruption. Education is crucial in this respect. So, we wanted IACA to become a center of excellence for education, training, and academic research in the field of anti-corruption, an institution helping anti-corruption professionals to upgrade their knowledge and capacities.

Thus, I have been involved in IACA activities since or even prior to its inception. As a member of the International Academic Advisory Board (IAAB) I worked on the development of its academic programs, and I remained a member of the (IAAB) until the moment I got appointed as Dean of IACA and the Executive Secretary of the



Assembly of Parties of the organization. This is the journey that brought me here, and I must say there is nothing I want to do more at this period of my life. This is what I want to do.

What is the focus of IACA's work? Do you think there are strong grounds for optimism?

IACA is an educational institution based on cooperation. We cooperate with universities and international organizations, invite the best experts to work with professionals from different countries. IACA has alumni from 168 countries. Every communication, every work, every training is an added value to the fight against corruption. Since my appointment, we have been talking about opening IACA even more. So far, we have always worked with professionals who are proficient in English language. My position is that there are many skilled professionals who do not speak English. So, we have opened the calls for lectures in French and Arabic.

For example, the African countries speak French. To bring the African professionals to IACA to give their expertise and hold lectures or make research, we need to offer this possibility. This is a good start. We have received the Board of Governors' support and support of the member states about this idea. I have discussed the idea bilaterally with some ambassadors.

At this moment IACA has 77 member states parties. There are countries which are not yet in our list including the big countries such as Canada, USA and the European countries like Germany, France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Norway, Poland, and others. This is something we need to focus on, to go back and talk about it with every respective government. May be, back at that time when IACA was established, the developed countries could not see the value of being one of the IACA state parties. Therefore, we need to address this issue again and emphasize the need to provide the highest quality education on various aspects of corruption. If the developed countries do not see the need to educate their own personnel or professionals, they will always be able to support the developing countries to train their professionals.

We need to address this issue to work together and to cooperate and bring on board developed countries. On one hand, in all aspects of the IACA's activities, such as master programs, tailored trainings or research we cooperate with professionals and lecturers from developed countries and their institutions, but again, it is good to have states to be members and to show their support for enhancing the capacity for fight against corruption in developing countries. Also, if you look where the



Awards, received by IACA through years, displayed in the IACA's corridors

corrupt or criminal assets are placed, you will find them in the developed countries. Asset recovery is based on knowledge of international standards and cooperation. So, our task is now to reach all these EU member countries and explain to them what the role of IACA in this fight is and make them think again that there is a need to develop education.

Allow me to underline that the member states do not have the obligation to pay contributions to the Academy though they have ratified the agreement. This way, we tell them that it is fine if you do not pay

contributions, instead it is better if they support the students and send them to IACA.

In our communication with developed countries, we promote the possibility to support developing countries by paying scholarships for their students as they cannot afford their studies. This is another way for the developed countries to support the developing countries in increasing their capacity for the fight against corruption.

On the other hand, we are focusing on working with the universities to integrate corruption topics in the syllabi. We work based on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), which is recognized by most of the EU member states. IACA is recognized as the higher education institution in Austria. So, IACA's diplomas are Austrian diplomas. We have initiated activity to check with the state parties whether they recognize our degrees and diplomas as this is particularly important to attract more students and to say that this diploma is relevant or can be connected to your studies in your university for advanced studies like PhD or others. We are also working on preparation to open PhD studies next year.

Can you speak about the importance of female leadership in this institution, and how your own experience as a woman in this field has influenced the results? As the only female dean of IACA, how do you feel about this experience so far?



The covers of IACALumnus magazine displayed in the premises of IACA.

I am the third, but first female Dean of the IACA. From my own experience, I would say that my own female leadership is proven to be good for such types of institutions. I was the first president of the anti-corruption commission established in my own country in 2002. This small agency dealt with difficult matters, such as privatization and asset declarations and I succeeded in making it a milestone in the institutional response to corruption. After that I was Director of the police academy, and it had 51 % female students. I was dean of the faculty for the detectives, and now I am Dean of the IACA. I cannot confirm by scientific evidence, that a women perform better, but I can say that the women are committed leaders, dedicated and brave to take the step, to take the lead, to make decision and give an example. To be a leader, you need to show how to do it. I have seen in many institutions that female leaders make satisfactory results and

substantial progress. They are decisive to make changes, to speak and do things. As a woman, I use my intuition. I do things that I believe are right. Intuition is a characteristic of the woman, I think.

What motivates you and the IACA to continue to work toward training and streamlining the people to combat corruption word wide?

Motivation comes from all sides. First, IACA is an educational institution, and at the same time an International Organization.

This is my first and biggest motivation. To be aware how important education is for progress, and to contribute to the changes we want to achieve by providing education-based on the best academic knowledge, research, and best experts' lecturers that provide training and education based on the ambitious standards and new

methodologies for students from every corner of the World. We believe in education and how education can contribute to changing our reality to be better.

The IACA, as an educational institution and international organization, understands the diversity of the global situation. First, all IACA employees come from different countries, we have professions and students coming from various countries. Also, our students are from different countries. At the last graduation ceremony on 4th December, we had 34 graduates from 24 countries! We understand that we have a great amount of diversity that needs to be unified in the fight against corruption. We are different but we have the same problem to solve. This is why the motivation of IACA, and my motivation too, is to bring everything together. This diversity is a challenge, and uniting different professions and cultures in working together is satisfaction and additional motivation.

In my view, there is not enough understanding about the need to have a good education in this field. Institutions dealing with corruption, organized crime and money-laundering need to cooperate. Therefore, part of the IACA's role is to bring all of them on board to work together. This is the place where we can invite everybody and collect their expertise. This is our team spirit. That is what people at IACA advocate and try to make it happen. We see that this is possible because we see more positive responses.

What are the challenges the Academy is currently facing, and what is needed to upgrade and enlarge the scope?

The biggest challenge IACA has been

facing in the past years is financial stability. Because it is an international organization which has 77 member states and 4 international organizations. However, the member states have no obligation to pay any fees to be a member of IACA. The idea to make IACA an independent educational institution was based on the vision that it would become self-sustainable by offering training. But it was not very much taken into consideration that IACA is an educational institution and center of excellence for active professionals who are already working and who need to spare some money and time for education. At that time, those who created the Academy thought that every state could bring one or two professionals for education in the IACA.

Therefore, our aim is to encourage the member states to support their own professionals. If it would be so, IACA would be self-sustainable enough, but not every country is sending professionals, and IACA's work has mainly been based on the scholarship provided for our students, training fees and different projects and programs. For example, Siemens Integrity Programs, founded around 10 years ago, was one of the main providers of scholarships. Right now, we are raising awareness of the countries to support the students. Also, I am trying to spread the word among the international community that is funding anti-corruption programs in different countries. This is my main challenge right now while working harder to bring more students in IACA. This is the best way; instead of asking for money from different countries, I ask for bringing more students to IACA as this is a win-win situation. All sides will benefit from this.

Also, I am calling on the developed countries to advise their embassies who have scholarship programs in the developed countries to support these students who will apply for IACA.

I have made many speeches and lectures about IACA and its programs and vision. Recently I received particularly good advice – to open the IACA to the public. Nothing has been decided yet. But as you saw this is a beautiful historical palace.

Why Laxenburg is chosen as the location of the Academy? As we understand the place is rich in history and served as a summer getaway for the aristocracy and high society during the times of the Habsburg dynasty.

Austria as the host country provided the capacity for establishing the IACA in general. Austrian Government bought this building from the previous owners and while we were working on the agreement on the IACA's establishment, we witnessed the progress of the reconstruction works. Austria invested a lot in this building and Laxenburg is established as the seat of the IACA with a separate annex to the agreement between the IACA and the Republic of Austria. For me personally, this palace symbolizes the IACA. It is our symbol. We have it in all our certificates.

The building, located near to Vienna, is in perfect condition. As I showed you, the classroom, the dining area, library, cafeteria, the garden, they are simply great. It helps you to stay focused in this historical environment.

Laxenburg is a historical place. The

IACA campus is set in Palais Kaunitz-Wittgenstein, which dates to the 17th century and is rich in history, having served as a nobility residence and a prominent women's educational facility. In 2010, it was renovated by the province of Lower Austria and transformed into a modern campus, with its ancient charm preserved. The Habsburg Dynasty was spending the summer here. They also built a direct railway from Schönbrunn Palace to Laxenburg. A fairytale style Schloss Laxenburg Castle is close to here. Many houses are built around the castle while a lot of tourists visit Laxenburg every year.

Beyond your academic and diplomatic costume, who is Mr. Slagjana Taseva? How do you spend your free time?

I'm a person who loves spending time with family and friends. I have two children and four grandchildren. I'm glad Vienna is not far from Skopje and the Hague, and we can visit each other. My friends say that besides my challenging profession, I am a normal person. I like talking to people,

I like walking in the park, in the mountains and by the Ohrid Lake in North Macedonia. I love swimming, skiing, reading books, watching good movies and listening to good music. I used to play violin at some time in my life. I travel a lot, mostly for work. I like to visit historical places and exquisite natural resorts such as the Band-e-Amer and the buddhas in Bamiyan (Afghanistan), but I also love exotic island of Papua New Guinea, and my friends who are my family in Port Moresby and in Bougainville: