GOOD GOVERNANCE: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE OSCE ROLE

Statement to the 9th Meeting of the OSCE Economic Forum

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I’m pleased to be here today to contribute to the discussion of good governance. As the representative of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights – the main Human Dimension institution of the OSCE – good governance is an issue very close to my heart. Human rights, democracy, rule of law and good governance are concepts so intertwined that they cannot really be separated. You might legitimately say, in fact, that everything we do at the ODIHR is connected with, and intended to promote, good governance. I’ll elaborate on some of our activities in the coming minutes.

Let me start with some propositions for your consideration.

Here’s one proposition: The Charter for European Security adopted in Istanbul in 1999 very rightly affirmed that corruption poses a great threat to the OSCE’s shared values. In fact, I believe corruption is a threat to security. It’s a threat to economic security, political security, and human security. It’s a problem in all regions of the OSCE. It’s sapping our resources, undermining our democracies, and impoverishing our people.

And corruption is a threat not only to national security, but also to international security. Corruption breeds transborder crime, abets trafficking, and creates conditions that increase tensions and undermine stability.

As a security organization, the OSCE needs to pay greater heed to this threat to security, and get more involved in combating it. This meeting provides the opportunity for a good start, but it’s only a start. If we’re serious about combating corruption, then we have to act seriously. Our collective failure to address this issue is one of the elements responsible for its growth.

Another proposition is that while good governance is essentially a national responsibility, the international community should use the tools it has to deal with the problem. One obvious one – that people don’t much like to discuss – is conditionality in international aid and lending. Perhaps it’s time for the OSCE to take a position on this and to recognize conditionality as a constructive, positive tool in promoting good governance. Perhaps this very meeting could take a step in that direction.

Conditionality doesn’t have to be seen as a threat or a punishment. It should be a simple matter of good practice and common sense. Would you want to invest your family savings in a company with corrupt or bad management? Of course not. By the same token, it’s just not logical for international financial institutions to be investing in countries with poor governance practices. There is never enough money to go around; what there is should go where it is most likely to make a difference and have a positive impact – to states that practice good governance.

A further good practice we have developed in the ODIHR is election monitoring. This is broadly and happily accepted by the OSCE participating States as a positive instrument to promote domestic confidence, transparency, fairness, and good public administration. But it is also an extremely intrusive mechanism in which hundreds of outsiders, over a period of several weeks, undertake a minute inspection of how states conduct some of their most sensitive political processes. If states are prepared to accept such international scrutiny with regard to their elections, perhaps some kind of transparent OSCE mechanism might also be devised to help monitor and assess other aspects of good governance.

Finally, a fourth good practice we’ve worked to develop is consultation and a sense of partnership among governments, opposition parties, and civil society on human rights and democracy issues. Under the ODIHR umbrella we’ve sponsored government-NGO meetings in many countries to air often difficult issues including torture, religious freedom, minority rights, and many others. The result has been increased public involvement in policy-making, increased accountability for the government,
strengthened civil society, and an improved partnership between governments and citizen groups. We’ve adopted the same approach in promoting legal reform through consultation, for example, sponsoring roundtable discussions between governments and opposition groups with a view to trying to reach broad understanding and agreement on sensitive legislation.

With this, let me end my remarks and say that I hope I have offered some ideas that will be useful for your upcoming discussions.

In conclusion, I’m encouraged that the OSCE is starting to take a more activist approach on the issue of good governance. There is much to be done. At the moment, the Organization is not structured to give adequate consideration or programmatic attention to this issue. The ODIHR, for example, is a small institution, our resources are already stretched, and under current circumstances we are certainly not in a position to take on the issue of good governance beyond our current activities in any significant way. The resources of the Economic and Environmental Coordinator are even smaller than those of the ODIHR. Still, if the OSCE can muster the necessary political determination, establish a clear mandate and provide the 9 required resources, then I’m sure there is a great deal the OSCE could contribute to the issue.

Thank you for your attention. I wish you good luck in your deliberations.