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Opening Session  
Amb. Mats Ringborg, Sweden

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## **OSCE Economic and Environment Forum, Prague 12-14 September 2012**

Opening Plenary

Statement by Ambassador Mats Ringborg, Sweden  
(full text, abbreviated when delivered)

Mr Chairman,

Thank you for having invited me to this event, and thank you for highlighting the economic and governance dimension as an important part of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. And thank you in particular, Mr Chairman, for your Food for Thought Paper. We find it very much to the point. You stress the importance of governance being equitable, transparent and accountable. You conclude that lack of good governance and lack of transparency open the door for abuse of power and corruption. These are observations that should guide us all in our efforts to improve governance, nationally and internationally.

I also have to say that it is nice to be back to the OSCE, in a sense. I actually participated, as a young Third Secretary, in a couple of meetings in Helsinki in 1975, during the preparations of the Final Act. In the 2nd basket, I believe it was called at the time.

How countries are governed matters. It matters not only for the citizens of that country but for other countries as well, from the point of view of security, economic development and global cohesion. This is clearly recognized in the 2003 Maastricht Strategic Document, and I quote – "good governance on the international as well as the national level is crucial for well-being, security and stability in the OSCE region".

Also, there is by now quite compelling empirical support for claiming that the quality of a country's political institutions determines its economic and social development.

Recent developments in North Africa and the Middle East have illustrated the fact that dictatorships and authoritarian regimes are inherently unstable, because of lack of popular support. Some of them survive for a long time

through repression. But in today's world, people's quest for democracy and development, and the possibilities opened up by new information technologies, will – hopefully – shorten the lifespan of remaining dictators. There are many examples of the destabilising international impact of authoritarian regimes – just to mention North Korea as an example. And Syria, of course. Democracies do not wage wars with each other. Countries that do not abide by their commitments in the field of fundamental freedoms and human rights are the ones that create international tensions.

Regrettably, the response of many governments to the events during the Arab spring has been increased repression and further restrictions on access to information and on civil society and political opposition. This inevitably affects international relations.

What constitutes good governance?

The **World Bank** has done an enormous amount of work in analysing and promoting good governance. I hardly see any references to the World Bank in the work done by the OSCE so far, which I find a bit strange.

The Bank has identified six key dimensions for good governance.

The **first** one is what is referred to as "**voice and accountability**", i.e. the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association and a free media. This is very much in line with what you have said in your Food for Thought Paper on the critical importance of transparency, access to information and a vibrant civil society.

In this connection, we should remind ourselves of the commitments we have all made in Chapter VII of the Helsinki Final Act, and I quote: "*...the Participating States recognize the universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for which is an essential factor for the peace, justice and well-being necessary to ensure the development of friendly relations and cooperation among themselves as among all States*".

These principles must constitute the point of departure for future work of the OSCE in the 2nd dimension. This is all the more important because regrettably, in many instances, implementation of these commitments is lagging and they are increasingly being questioned.

In this connection, I would like to highlight the extremely important role played by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mme Milatovic'. The way that she acts in drawing the attention of governments and the international community to human rights abuses, restrictions on media freedom and to violations of OSCE commitments is critically important. She has repeatedly and rightly emphasized that there is no security without free media and freedom of expression. Also the other two autonomous institutions,

ODHIR and HCNM, play key roles in assisting participating states in fulfilling our commitments. And we welcome very much the clear stance taken by the Chair of the OSCE. We hope and expect that the incoming chairmanships will play a similar role.

Both the Chairperson and Mme Milatovic' have underlined the importance of internet freedom. My Government attaches great importance to this topic. There are worrying developments in this field to which Mme Milatovic' has drawn our attention. Through the internet, people have been given an instrument to demand change. Internet is a key means through which freedom of expression can be exercised.

Let me just draw your attention to the landmark resolution on freedom on the internet that was

adopted by the Human Rights Council on 29 June. The resolution was presented by Brazil, Nigeria, Sweden, Tunisia, Turkey and the United States. It was co-sponsored by more than 80 countries and it is good to see that we find 44 of the 56 OSCE members among them.

The conclusion is that "good governance" and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms go hand in hand. Conversely, governance is bad if human rights and fundamental freedoms are not respected.

I mentioned that "voice and accountability" is one of the dimensions of good governance identified by the World Bank. The others are **"Political Stability and Absence of Violence"**, **"Government Effectiveness"**, **"Regulatory Quality"**, **"Rule of Law"** and **"Control of Corruption"**.

**"Rule of Law"** is defined as the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence. **"Control of Corruption"** is defined as the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as "capture" of the state by elites and private interests.

I have spent some time on these World Bank dimensions and criteria because I believe that they are highly relevant as point of departures for future work to be carried out by the OSCE. They are based on experience accumulated over a long period of time of what works and what does not. We have said many times that the OSCE must draw upon and benefit from the work that has been done by others.

The World Bank publishes assessments of the situation in these respects in more than 200 countries in the Worldwide Governance Indicators report. So it is quite possible to see what OSCE countries do well and what countries that do not do so well.

Hopefully OSCE countries will seek guidance at the World Bank in their efforts to improve governance.

Mr Boucher from **the OECD** has told us about the important work that that organisation does in the field of public governance. This is also very relevant for future work within the OSCE. There is the flagship publication "Government at a Glance", where you will find a wealth of information on OECD member countries' policies and practices in the field of public governance. The report includes a special section on Freedom of Information Laws. In addition, as Mr Boucher has mentioned, the OECD has published a number of recommendations - on Managing Conflict of Interest in the Public Service, on Improving Ethical Conduct in the Public Sector, on Enhancing Integrity in Public Procurement, among others.

These recommendations are based on OECD member countries' best practices, and they must be accepted by any country that wants to become a member of the organisation.

I think the OSCE could benefit a lot from the work carried out by the OECD in assisting member states in their efforts to promote public integrity.

Generally, the OECD also sets a high standard when it comes to the overriding importance of the rule of law – an independent and impartial judiciary, effective checks and balances within the political system, full implementation of legislation and regulations at the federal, regional and local levels; and operational independence and accountability of law enforcement agencies.

We believe that the OECD acquis in the field of public governance should be carefully looked at by all OSCE countries that are not members of the OECD.

Many OSCE countries have endorsed the **Open Government Declaration** within the framework of the **Open Government Partnership**. This is also something that should be taken into account by the OSCE when we plan future activities in the field of access to information.

On **corruption**, I just want to say that it is very appropriate indeed to deal with good governance and corruption at the same time. As a matter of fact, experience and research show that corruption will not be reduced without effective and sustainable policies for good governance, in accordance with the World Bank dimensions I have just mentioned, not least when it comes to "voice and accountability" and "rule of law".

Recently, the Secretary-General of the United Nations has noted – and I quote – that "neither peace, development nor human rights can flourish in an atmosphere of corruption". This is a very powerful message that we should all take very seriously.

Strong policies to combat corruption are not likely to be implemented without a strong involvement of individual citizens and the civil society. Ordinary

citizens are the ones that suffer most from corruption. So if a country restricts fundamental freedoms and the possibilities for civil society organisations to grow and work, that country demonstrates in a way that it is not really interested in combating corruption. Perhaps the governments of these countries are more interested in retaining the privileges of a ruling elite. So again we come back to the question of political will.

From this point of view I find it extremely regrettable that some OSCE countries oppose a full participation by the civil society in the UN Convention against Corruption Implementing Review Mechanism. I find this position difficult to understand, in view of the commitments we have all made on civil society involvement, and considering the fact that civil society could make very useful contributions. As I said, the role of civil society is critical for reform and change to take place. I also find it regrettable and even absurd that the UNCAC review mechanism prescribes that the country reports shall remain confidential, and that the reports shall be agreed upon between the reviewing states and the state under review.

What I have said in these respects is very much in line with the conclusions from the Dublin meeting in April.

I know that Transparency International is not very popular in all OSCE countries but that does not mean that we should disregard the assessment on corruption levels that this organisation publishes in its Corruption Perceptions Index. Some OSCE countries have an extremely low ranking. The conclusion is that much remains to be done in these countries, for a number of reasons, not least to improve the climate for foreign direct investment.

To conclude, Mr Chairman, I welcome very much that a special panel tomorrow will discuss the question of "strengthening civil society and media engagement in support of good governance".