

Speech by Mr Jari PARTANEN, State Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Finland

Delivered at the 12th plenary meeting of the CDDG

Council of Europe 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance

– some practical challenges in Finland

Dear Director General, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor for me to have this possibility to take part to the plenary meeting of your committee. I very much appreciate your excellent work in your countries, in working groups and other bodies as well as the work of the secretariat and the Center of Expertise.

Finland is in the process of reforming our administration. We try to establish the new regional level, with plan to transfer to regions duties of health and social services and fire and rescue services, currently part of municipal administration. These regions will be called as welfare area. We are working in exceptional times. We had some challenges eve before Covid-19 crisis. Always in reforms, our Constitutional legislation should be noted very carefully. It is very good to have framework like 12 principles, a working tool, helping us to face all challenges and not forgetting any of them.

Principle 1 is about elections: We are going to have Local council elections next spring. In our very municipality-centered country, it is important to find good candidates for keeping our system local-based. We have not been too keen on E-elections, but perhaps in future, we need some re-thinking. We also need to take note on young persons and new e-tools they use in daily basis.

Principle 2, responsiveness. Our big reforms have shown, asking responses with too short intervals can cause fatigue: there is much room for better co-operation of all involved, and easier following of long processes. One very delicate point is financing reforms – constitution and also the European Charter of Local-Self-Government must be taken into account. We have already been open to adjust some parts of our proposal about finance issues, according to the feedback.

There is a lot of room for greater efficiency in principle 3. We could have better use of open data. We should find information gaps and fill them. It is important to grasp the promise of digitalisation as concrete as possible and using Artificial Intelligence with purpose. I was very glad to hear how German Presidency has taken a very positive and concrete way to cook this difficult issue, in co-ordination and co-operating, like my colleague yesterday pointed in his presentation to you. I wish Germany a most successful Presidency and thanks to Greece for their excellent work during their part.

Principle 4 is very important - Opening data to ordinary citizens. We could better open cost of public services, alternative ways, have better applications to make using easier. Of best

practices, the Finnish tax administration has been quite brilliant: we can almost love our taxes, because their applications are so good!

The 5th principle is for law. In Finland, we have a strong legalistic tradition and sometimes we believe too much to legislation. It should be clear and flexible. Flexible sections of Local Government Act concerning tools of local democracy have proved to be successful.

Principle 6 is for Ethics. In complex world, we need simple ethical rules. There is too easy tendency to distance from citizens: citizen panels etc should be used more. I like to raise another best practice here: Finnish police is one of our most trusted public organisations – they have their own ethical conduct framework.

Dear ladies and gentlemen, we have real and difficult points of development and we highly value good advice from abroad.

The 7th principle is about capacity. Because of our population is getting older and many employees are retiring at municipal level, there is increasing lack of resources and personal skills. Better ways of co-operating and sharing is needed. Too much competition between municipalities can be a burden, too.

Principle no 8 is a tough one. Reforming done in too big components can be challenging. We have tried to reform social and health care and also the social security system – they are huge tasks. Limited and open approach is needed for finding new ways to innovate. Covid-19 shows importance of rethinking: we must be open to surprises as well! Often problems are political. In Finland, Government usually works for 4 years. Because of constitutional limitations, it is important to get also the opposition involved in big reforms. It is not always easy, but historically Consensus has been good for developing our society.

Principle 9 is about long term orientation. Government works very much on giving stable future: pandemic, environment, the balance of welfare State for new generations. Keeping the whole Finland involved is important! I like to specially emphasize the role of capable and stable civil servant system in Finland – in central and local level.

No 10 of sound economy, this is the favorite principle of Ministry of Finance. Balance of public economy is important, controlling debt and deficit. State control itself as does municipal sector. However, in the end, economy is just a tool, for serving citizens and providing services.

Principle 11 is about human rights: Defending the weak. Covid-19 crisis underlines safety. Our Government program also promote easier use of national languages+sami languages+getting deaf people involved. It is an important challenge of big society to get everybody involved.

The last principle no 12, accountability. There is a big challenge of updated and sound data on development, of both State Budget and Local economy, of service needs and right ways to arrange them. It is the dream of better data-based leadership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The biggest challenge of them all and the most important principle:

Administration should remember its role of serving citizens better, providing value for money. If all is OK, we still can find room for further development and better future for next generations.

It has been a pleasure to me to give this short presentation. In my country, we are doing much, but like to be open to your experience and best practices. And if you find something in our work interesting we are happy to share it with you, for better development and co-operation.

Thank you for attention and good and safe working to you all!