



SIGMA Ministerial Conference
Good Public Governance – Delivering for Citizens and Businesses
13-14 December 2017

Opening speech 14 December 2017

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Dear Ministers, Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here today to open the SIGMA Ministerial Conference on ‘Good Public Governance – Delivering for Citizens and Businesses’. It is a great pleasure to address such a prominent audience of key ministers and high-level civil servants responsible for public administration reform. Having served as the minister responsible for public administration reform myself, I know exactly why it is important that the highest level decision makers are fully engaged.

This conference celebrates the 25th anniversary of SIGMA. Created in 1992 as a joint initiative of the OECD and the European Union to focus on strengthening public management, SIGMA has worked with EU Accession countries, many of which are now OECD and EU members. This is the first time that SIGMA has gathered key reformers of public administration from all 18 of its partners.

My personal journey with SIGMA started in 2014, at the launch of the Principles of Public Administration. Three years later, I am pleased to see that the Principles are used by many of you as a blueprint for designing and implementing your public administration reforms. The Principles are one example of excellent co-operation between the OECD and European Union in supporting good public governance through SIGMA. I would like to personally thank the European Commission on behalf of the OECD for such an excellent collaboration over the years.

I am proud to say that OECD works widely with the governments represented here today through several initiatives. Besides SIGMA’s work, our MENA, South East

Europe and Eurasia programmes also contribute to building stable and clear business environments for your citizens and businesses. For example, our South East Europe regional programme has helped these governments in developing the economic policy reform agendas. The Competitiveness Outlook and the SME Policy Index have become recognised sources of comparison and learning. We can already see some positive signs of these reforms, and more are embedded in the Economic Reform Programmes. Similarly, for more than a decade now, the MENA-OECD Governance Programme has been working with the MENA region, helping its governments design and implement effective public sector reforms for inclusive growth. The Eurasia Programme promotes OECD standards and approaches throughout Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, with particular emphasis on reforms to promote better business environments and more dynamic private sectors.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Building good governance is an investment into the quality of life of your own citizens. It is in your hands how to bring more value for your societies by transforming and improving how your public administration works.

The agenda of today's conference is crafted around this key question: how to deliver for citizens and businesses? There will be interesting speeches and talks to set the scene and inspire the discussion. But, the personal, active involvement and collegial exchange between ministers and other high-level colleagues is essential. Your thoughts and reflections are not only providing valuable feedback for us, but give us further ideas how we can assist and help you in your reform path.

In Plenary session 1, we will discuss about transformation of governance to meet new challenges and cope with complexity. Leaders need to look at the future and prepare for tomorrow, while taking care of today. Because of the changing environment, all governments are required to think of these new needs and pressures, but also opportunities, to transform their governance. For most of you as the leaders and key decision makers of transition societies, this challenge is

even more complex. So, let's not forget that challenges also present opportunities and think how to take your reforms further, not in one step, but in ten steps.

Plenary 2 will highlight the importance of good governance and sound public finances in building a competitive business environment. Public administration reforms need to be associated with economic development. I am very glad that so many ministers of finance are here today to discuss how good public governance can pave the way for long-term growth.

We have a dedicated Talk, with subsequent reflections, on how to make citizen engagement part of governance reforms. We need to ask ourselves, how can our governments keep pace with all the new ways of citizen mobilisation and social movements, in an era of social media and 24/7 news feeds. It is not just a communication issue, but one that touches deeply the question of trust in government as well as opening new paths for innovation.

Distinguished guests,

I would like to invite you to have a very open discussion and collegial exchange in the three roundtables this afternoon. Roundtable one is focusing on the support of structural economic reforms through good public governance, the second on the creation of a business-friendly environment through public services, and the third on ensuring the rule of law in practice. I hope that you will get new ideas and fresh insights and use this opportunity to have interesting discussions on these key topics. These focus areas are the building blocks for enhancing the stability, regulatory clarity, transparency and efficiency of your public administration.

And at the end of the day, we will have a Talk on another key issue many governments around the world are facing – why the rule of law is so important for citizens and businesses and how to achieve that in the middle of political turbulence? These are the issues that need to be brought forward and discussed both amongst political leaders and key decision makers like you, but also with your citizens.

I hope that this interesting agenda will allow for a stimulating day, full of new ideas and inspiration, learning and sharing.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is always a challenge to build a well-functioning public administration as it often requires difficult changes and major reforms. Such reforms need political support and consensus, as well as buy-in from citizens. We appreciate and acknowledge all the efforts many of you have personally made. We can see good developments and success stories which we invite you to share today. We believe your citizens can see and feel the difference made by some of your reforms.

Still, we must not forget that public administration reform can never be completed or taken for granted. It is never 'done'. Constant commitment and care has to be taken to maintain a well-functioning public administration. We have seen that sometimes good developments and reforms can be reversed. Freshly published SIGMA Monitoring Reports also demonstrate that the real changes are not always happening in practice and nice laws do not always make the real difference that they could.

You, as key ministers and decision makers, are the ones who can make a difference and change things for the better. It is not for the sake of standing out in international comparisons. More importantly, it is for the quality of life of your citizens. Continuation of public administration reforms is needed for further cohesion, stability and economic development of your countries.

Honoured guests,

We are here for you with all our knowledge, skills, experience and networks. It is an honour for the OECD to earn such trust and build close relationships with you and your colleagues. We are very grateful for that and will continue to work hard to maintain your trust and interest in our expertise.

Please share your experience and priorities with each other and with us. Tell us how can we create change together to improve your public governance. Sharing ideas and finding solutions will give us confidence in taking this important reform agenda further.

I wish you a successful and fruitful day. Thank you very much.