

Opening speech / Coordinate Minister of Finance, Ulla-Maj Wideroos

Mr Secretary General, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to welcome you to the 4th Quality Conference of Public Administrations in the EU to be held here in Tampere.

(Individuals/organisations)

I would like to start by thanking you all. Thank you for coming to the 4QC. The heart of this conference are the participants, the best practice cases and the speakers. These conferences have been from the start, from the very first held in Lisbon 2000, about sharing. Sharing best practices and sharing lessons learned, sharing anxiety over hardships and sharing joys of accomplishments.

When the first quality conference was initiated, the main idea was to bring people together. People from different levels of government, different sectors and obviously also from different countries. This has not changed. We still think that this conference is about listening to each other, discussing views, and spreading ideas.

We are not here to teach, we are all here to learn and that is a big difference. None of us, none of your organisations, would know exactly what others need. We cannot teach each other compact solutions but we can learn from the cases, we can learn from the experience of others and during the conference we can - and this is important - also learn about our own organisations and ourselves.

The thoughts and ideas you get during the conference for the quality work in your own organisations are not ready to be implemented when you go home.

But the idea might have been found and during the next months and coming times it will mature into something you can use in your organisation. It might be a big new development project, but it might also be a small tiny change, but still significant.

The people who come to these quality conferences are on the frontline in development. You represent organisations and reform units, where modernising is self-evident and a part of the daily life. This attitude is really valuable to your organisations since in today's world also public sector organisations need to be compatible. When an organisation imagines that it is ready, it starts to deteriorate. Success lies not in merely achieving one goal, it lies in constantly going over existing procedures.

The only way to keep up the good standards is to train and to keep on learning. Accomplishments in motivating the personnel are a key and a prerequisite for real change, but it calls for constant attention. It is not always easy to keep all the personnel motivated in development work.

People who have gathered here today are - I tend to think - people who have a record of demonstrated capacity for innovation and self-motivation. You are people who take the progress forward. And sometimes it is hard that not everybody is as keen to move ahead. But let us remember that we can also be happy that there are other kind of individuals in our organisations.

It is good that there are also holdouts. We should not follow their advice of not doing anything, but it is good that for them we need to justify our ways of thinking. They do not stop us but they help us not to advance too quickly and to think things over one more time.

But here at the 4QC we are all surrounded by people as eager as ourselves to take the work forward. This is a time to give and get encouragement of one's peers.

(Government level)

I have been talking about what is the meaning of the European Quality conferences to the individuals and their organisations. But there are also other levels. These conferences have importance for the governments. And not just that but on the European level they are important for the co-operation between the national governments. When Finland decided to offer to host the 4QC, we set ourselves targets. Of course one target was and is to provide the participants a good conference so that when you leave you will be happy that you attended.

But we also wanted the conference to support the quality work done in public sector organisations all over Europe and beyond. And we have as a target that the conference would be an asset in the further development of co-operation between the different European countries.

When we look at the three previous quality conferences of Lisbon, Copenhagen and Rotterdam we can see that each of them has been an important step in strengthening the co-operation and in building the sustainability of the network of public sectors around Europe. This is what we want to continue.

Co-operation is not something that happens by accident or that could be a matter of course. It is always a challenge. We in Finland think that public actors cannot achieve much without other actors, be it nationally or internationally. We cannot realise our targets or policies alone, we are always dependent on the knowledge and actions of others. And in the future governance needs to be increasingly realised through networks. Furthermore through networks that exceed the traditional boundaries - both geographical and institutional.

The 4QC is one arena for interaction, for strengthening existing and forming future networks. We do not only meet here to find solutions to problems that concern our organisation. We meet here also to discuss the challenges our administrations face and to give our views on what are the future themes our governments should concentrate on.

In the coming years we are faced with the challenge of producing better performance, increasing productivity, coping with the increasing demand of public services brought to us by the ageing population and we need to tackle with strengthening the trust in government and ensuring diversity.

One important factor why we have actively pursued public management reforms in Finland for the last two decades is that we firmly believe that good public governance is a very important factor for the competitiveness of our nation. When discussing competitiveness it is not just about nations anymore, increasingly we talk about the competitiveness of Europe in the global comparisons.

For the competitiveness of Europe the co-operation in building better governance is a must. We all need continuous work on the national level to make full use of the EU cooperation. And all the time we need to bear in mind that this work needs to profit all involved not just our own administration.

There are two things I would like to say regarding the co-operation on the European level. First in this work we should never cease to challenge its goals and ways of work to make them even better. That is why I would like to assure you that we need all of you, your ideas, your support and your debate. It is crucial for the European success that our work is not discussed in close circuits but rather in open arenas like the quality conferences.

The second thing I would like to emphasise is that we should never underestimate the significance of this work - your work - our work. We sometimes tend to think that this is not so important and we may quit trying because we do not see immediate results or appreciation, But let me assure you that by developing co-operation between countries and administrations and by developing the quality of our public services we build trust in public administration, in government and in European co-operation.

Let us not forget that in a world where events in international politics and co-operation sometimes look gloomy, this kind of collaboration between nations is never in vain.

(Citizens)

In our cooperation we have the continuing challenge to meet the higher expectations of the citizens. And we need to be frank with ourselves that in many occasions, in many development seminars the word citizen is rarely heard. We have chosen citizen to be one of the sub themes of this conference and some of the agoras are built around that theme, and we have among the participants people from citizen organisations. But that is not enough. What we must constantly keep in mind is that all the work for future is done for the citizens and that the cooperation and dialogue we do at all the levels should also reach the citizens.

One famous quote says “The only title in our democracy superior to that of the President is the title of citizen”. Wishing you three enjoyable days at the conference I also ask you to remember all through the conference that citizens are what we are here for.

Welcome to Tampere - welcome to the 4QC!